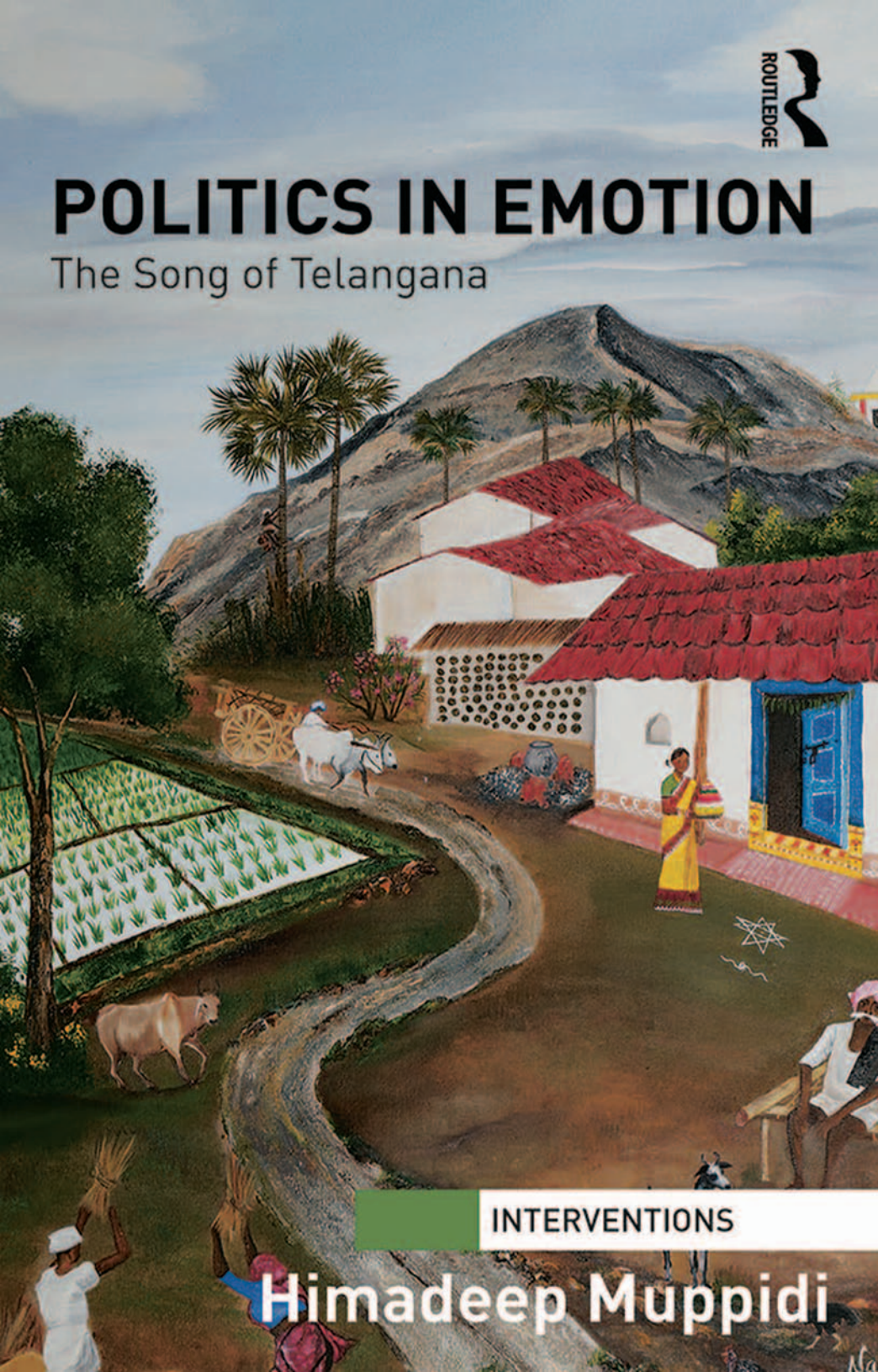
ROUTLEDGE
POLITICS IN EMOTION
The Song of Telangana
INTERVENTIONS
Himadeep Muppidi

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Politics in Emotion

The work explores a subaltern local sovereignty movement called "Telangana" in India. Over the last ten years, this movement has engaged in a massive political mobilization, including strikes, rallies, work stoppages, occupation of public spaces, electoral contests, 200 and more political suicides and media battles. But, interestingly enough, notwithstanding a political mobilization that has brought day-to-day life to a halt on a number of occasions, it has remained largely invisible in international media and global politics.

Fascinated by the social movement's international invisibility as well as the causes and conditions of its eruption around a city/region that has become a showcase for new capitalist development, Muppidi seeks to unpack this issue, showing that this invisibility is not just intrinsically puzzling, but also represents the operation of power on a global scale. Investigating the conditions of invisibility in this instance can therefore tell us something important about the way global power works to produce visibility and invisibility in the twenty-first-century world.

This book provides a unique resource for students of Postcolonialism, International Relations and South Asian Studies.

Himadeep Muppidi is Betty G.C. Cartwright Professor of Political Science and International Studies at Vassar College, New York. He is the author of *The Colonial Signs of International Relations* (2012), *The Politics of the Global* (2004) and the co-editor (with Andrew Davison) of *Europe and Its Boundaries: Words and Worlds, Within and Beyond* (2009) and *The World is My Home: A Hamid Dabashi Reader* (2011).

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Politics in Emotion

The Song of Telangana

Himadeep Muppidi

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Introduction

Politics compels. It demands us: it kills, tortures, reasons and sings. It forces attention by showering weapons and words on bodies. Weapons shatter bodies, and words are often weapons themselves. But weapons and "words as weapons" prey on estranged bodies; they are parasitic on a world riven into friends and enemies. We know, however, that the world is, that we are, more than that; words have lives richer than weapons. In *Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe evokes a world nourished by such wealth: "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (1959: 7). As an art of conversation or as story telling, as proverbs and parables, words weave new solidarities and mend old tears. Sung or strung well, they pull together estranged bodies. Words make worlds (Gluck and Tsing, 2009).

It is the promise of such affluent societies that compels me through the pages that follow. I am struck by the contrast of word-poor realms whose clichés are planted everywhere and word-rich ones whose poems and songs are left obscure. Telangana offers me a way of layering this concern into global political thought. What emerges from this concern is not an explicit analysis of the problem of Telangana, but rather essays that experiment with grafting and nurturing its meanings in conceptually arid environments. The obscurity of Telangana, within the ecology of global and postcolonial thought, stands in strong contrast to the lively agitations of these bodies, the cadences of their songs and the nuances of their political mobilizations: richly expressive and resistant practices whose singularity has not drawn attention beyond local linguistic borders. Hailing from, hailed by, these local borders, I cannot not address the fecund site of the political made from words, words and more words here: words drunk with the "palm-oil" of stories and songs, words that make bodies dance and sing, fuse and sway, towards new horizons. These essays, therefore, grapple with the question of how to write and think,

how to articulate, Telangana against the mechanisms producing and sustaining its obscurity.

Writing against obscurity has led me to forgery. In making these essays, I have drawn from variously archived fragments: conversations, stories, memories, songs and the speeches of people around me, in India and the United States, people who either come from, live in or can relate to Telangana. I have called on academics, movement sympathizers, students, ordinary citizens and political leaders as their anguished and angry responses were available in personal interviews, journal articles, public meetings, political speeches, newspaper and magazine reports, televised debates, call-in programs and blog posts. In the last few years, these and like materials have blazed with the exuberance of groups reimagining their locales, resuscitating their languages and vivifying their histories—people, practices, languages and locales that are intimately familiar to me, that have constituted diverse parts of me, and, yet, that are also, conceptually and otherwise, beyond me in many ways.

Staring at this treasure trove, I am reminded of a memorable scene in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* when the unnamed narrator is "standing in Mustafa Sa'eed's house in front of the iron door, the door of the rectangular room with the triangular roof and green windows, the key in my pocket and my adversary inside with, doubtless, a fiendish look of happiness on his face" (1969: 135–138). The narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed have both been educated in Europe but have come back to Sudan, to the "small village at the bend of the Nile." By this point in the story, Mustafa Sa'eed is dead but he has entrusted the narrator with the keys to his house, inside which is a locked room that the latter has long been curious about.

Standing in front of the door of this locked room, the narrator muses: "I am the guardian, the lover and the adversary," thinking, perhaps, of the affinities and the contrasting relations Mustafa Sa'eed and he have had with each other, with the village and with Europe. After unlocking the door, as his eyes adjust slowly to what is inside the room, this room with "an odour like that of an old memory," this locked room in a house in a "small village at the bend of the Nile," what appear before him are rows and rows of books and books: "Good God, the four walls from floor to ceiling were filled, shelf upon shelf, with books and more books and yet more books."

The narrator's initial gesture is to ridicule Mustafa Sa'eed's desire to build and keep secret a room like this after having deliberately chosen, in hiding his past and settling in this obscure village, to leave Europe behind ("What a fool he was! Was this the action of a man who wanted to turn over a new leaf?"). He wants to destroy it ("I shall bring the

whole place down upon his head; I shall set it on fire"). But, noticing that the room also contained a "real English fireplace:"

> How ridiculous! A fireplace—imagine it! A real English fireplace with all the bits and pieces, above it a brass cowl and in front of it a quadrangular area tiled in green marble, with the mantelpiece of blue marble; on either side of the fireplace were two Victorian chairs covered in a figured silk material, while between them stood a round table with books and notebooks on it.

His curiosity—his desire to "see and hear" more—gets the better of his desire to "bring the whole place down" ("Though I sought revenge, yet I could not resist my curiosity. First of all I shall see and hear, then I shall burn it down as though it had never been"); so he puts out the fire he had just lit, and begins to list what he "sees and hears."

He notices that the books that he "could see in the light of the lamp" were "arranged in categories":

> Books on economics, history and literature. Zoology. Geology. Mathematics. Astronomy. The Encyclopaedia Britannica. Gibbon. Macaulay. Toynbee. The complete works of Bernard Shaw. Keynes. Tawney. Smith. Robinson. *The Economics of Imperfect Competition*. Hobson *Imperialism*. Robinson *An Essay on Marxian Economics*. Sociology. Anthropology. Psychology. Thomas Hardy. E.G. Moore. Thomas Moore. Virginia Woolf. Wittgenstein. Einstein. Brierly. Namier.

But, even as he lists what his eyes catch, the narrator's gaze morphs into sound, furrows into his memory:

> Books I had heard of and others I had not. Volumes of poetry by poets of whom I did not know the existence. *The Journals of Gordon. Gulliver's Travels*. Kipling. Housman. *The History of the French Revolution* Thomas Carlyle. *Lectures on the French Revolution* Lord Acton.

Dwells lovingly on the style, size, fragility and freshness of the books filling his senses:

> Books bound in leather. Books in paper covers. Old tattered books. Books that looked as if they'd just come straight from the printers. Huge volumes the size of tombstones. Small books with gilt edges the size of packs of playing cards.

Pierces through their covers ("Signatures. Words of dedication"), hovers over their sheer thingness, their materiality ("Books in boxes. Books on the chairs. Books on the floor"), wondering, simultaneously, what this all meant ("What play-acting is this? What does he mean? Owen. Ford Madox Ford. Stefan Zweig. E.G. Browne. Laski. Hazlitt. *Alice in Wonderland*. Richards. *The Koran* in English. *The Bible* in English. Gilbert Murray. Plato."). As this evocative visual and aural journey winds down, passing by Mustafa Sa'eed's contributions to this land of books ("*The Economics of Colonialism* Mustafa Sa'eed. *Colonialism and Monopoly* Mustafa Sa'eed. *The Rape of Africa* Mustafa Sa'eed"), it also reaches its border, arriving, slowly, almost wearily, at an awareness of the linguistic limits of the European legacy enshrined here: "Not a single Arabic book."

What does a locked room with shelves and shelves of English books, in diverse shapes, sizes and styles, but with not a single book in Arabic—even the Koran it collects is in English—a double (literally and linguistically) locked room, in a house in "a small village at the bend of the Nile," signify? The narrator cannot but wonder about the meaning and significance of this locked room: "A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke. A treasure chamber. 'Open, Sesame, and let's divide up the jewels among the people.'" Was this the place where Mustafa Sa'eed's European education was enshrined or entombed in all its glory? Was this the secret retreat for Mustafa Sa'eed who had drunk deeply from Europe but pretended to be just another villager, a retreat where he could continue to sip, away from the probing eyes of the village? What was this absurdity?

And, why am I riveted by this sensorily meandering journey through the book and mortar landscape of Europe and its boundaries? Is it because the image of a room with books overflowing its shelves is the almost obligatory backdrop, an assemblage, of the academic body displaying its secret and not so secret armory and granary, the site of its weapons as well as its word-food? Is it because those rows and rows of books and the invisible pipelines of thought and offense they hook into speaks, in many ways, to the subterranean networks shared by colonials and postcolonials?

In pointing to this underground intimacy, my intention is not to disregard or be dismissive of the difference between colonial and postcolonial networks. Postcolonial pipelines draw from epistemic sources that have been seized back, nationalized, in the name of another commons. With the onset of the postcolonial condition, books in Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Telugu now appear, with greater ease and in greater range, on the shelves, probably adding to the series that Mustafa Sa'eed

had already started ("*The Economics of Colonialism* Mustafa Sa'eed. *Colonialism and Monopoly* Mustafa Sa'eed. *The Rape of Africa* Mustafa Sa'eed"), though not necessarily escaping the censuring eye of the colonial still forging the protocols of legitimate knowledge:

> Here the Englishman intervened to say … that Mustafa Sa'eed was not a reliable economist. "I read some of the things he wrote about what he called 'the economics of colonization.' The overriding characteristic of his writings was that his statistics were not to be trusted. … The economist isn't a writer … or a political reformer … he's an instrument, a machine that has no value without facts, figures, and statistics; the most he can do is to define the relationship between one fact and another, between one figure and another. … No, this Mustafa Sa'eed of yours was not an economist to be trusted."

So, underground intimacies or the sharing of networks might not necessarily lead to greater trust or an end to the conflict between colonial and postcolonial epistemes.

And yet, nearly half a century after postcolonialism has taken back old lines and laid new ones into these rooms, and not only rearranged the European landscape of books and mortar but produced new canons in Telugu and Hindi and multiple other languages, is something still missing in the sources of our epistemic energy? Is it that these new networks continue to by-pass the villages, and is that why it is so incongruous to find a secret room filled with books and books in a small village at the bend of the Nile? Or, is it that, only when the villagers are refined into something that they themselves might not recognize ("peasants"), they are entered into these books and can access these secret rooms with books and pipelines spreading all over the world ("Are these the people who are called *peasants* in books? Had I told my grandfather that revolutions are made in his name, that governments are set up and brought down for his sake, he would have laughed" (64–65))? Couldn't we say that, the postcolonial grid notwithstanding, knowledge about the village is still drained in the name of the peasant, the peasant as a grandfather at best, the grandfather as only a peasant? Peasant: what a crude processing, in colonial and postcolonial terminals, of the words, songs, dances, bodies and worlds of hundreds of millions of our global compatriots.

Now, located decades away from the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed but situated very much like them in small rooms, near the Hudson sometimes, the Mississippi occasionally and, more rarely, the Musi, in rooms secured with colonial and postcolonial pipelines, if I close my eyes and

listen carefully, I am going to claim that I can hear voices and beats from villagers and villages near and far. There's a lot of agitation and energy out there. There's music and noises and murmurs and excitedly moving bodies. Sometimes the books on my walls, English and Telugu alike, cushion the sounds from these places. Sometimes, if the winds and tubes and screens carry them right, the books are helpless against the music and the dancing and I feel a need to venture out of these small rooms, go into the spaces outside, and wade into these new sources of epistemic energy. More often than not, however, I content myself with catching some notes and pulling together wordly pages on what those beats, this music, those lyrics, do to me or mean to my body. Writing them down, recording them, in the confines of these rooms, is more compelling than joining the dances in the streets and towns and villages sprawling outside. It is a compulsion that troubles me a bit. I wonder why. Could it be because, in this world of small rooms, rooms of our own, where books flow ceaselessly out of diverse terminals, politics should always be parlayed into newer and newer fabrications? Or, is it because my academic body, an assemblage of so many words, is incompetent at engaging politics otherwise? Shunning these rude doubts, bowing to the spirits of the academy, I offer here a small forging, a very small one, for those overflowing shelves.

1 Postcolonial auditions

In late November 2011, I noticed, on a friend's Facebook (FB) page, two seemingly familiar and yet somewhat strange words: *Kolaveri, Kolaveri*, they said, almost as if he was humming a tune or muttering something to himself. Assuming it was some inside joke, a local sign that I was not privy to, I let it pass. In a day or two, those words came up again, in another activist friend's post with a comment on their compulsiveness, his desire to say them again and again. I gathered that it was a song, a tune, and since neither of these friends was given to liberally posting songs on Facebook, I was intrigued enough to look these words up—on YouTube—and hooked enough, in a few minutes, to listen to the song a couple of times. There was something different and yet familiar, something appealing and yet many things opaque about this new song. The tune was "catchy" and, sweetened as the video was with joyous faces seemingly caught in the act of creating music, pleasing to watch. Though candy for the eyes and ears, it also had parts that did not dissolve and disappear instantaneously. I did not know what the words *Kolaveri, Kolaveri di* meant, for instance. And even though much of the song was subtitled in English, these words were not. They were intriguingly unfamiliar.

Provoked enough, I looked them up, did my homework as it were, and noticed that an article had already appeared in an Indian left-liberal newspaper on the *kolaveri* phenomenon. In a matter of an hour or two, I had begun to unexpectedly acquire an awareness of a Tamil-English tune and the meanings of a few Tamil words, and sundry movie heroes and music and film directors. This was already too much information about a tune that had randomly floated unto my screen. But more was in store for me.

A few hours later, at a gathering in Minneapolis, almost as an inside joke, I muttered those words—*Kolaveri, Kolaveri di*—to an Indian friend, presuming that only she might be in the "know" (Why would anyone outside an Indian context be familiar with a new Tamil hit?). Imagine my surprise, when others in the room—none of the rest being

Tamil, South Indian or even Indian—burst out laughing in recognition. Not only had they heard of the song by then, but they had already listened to it a number of times that day. *Kolaveri, Kolaveri di* had traveled far in a matter of hours and wormed beyond its Tamil boundaries to many other paths, finding its way even to Minneapolis. It had, in social networking parlance, gone viral; it had transformed into a meme. When I first wrote this in Poughkeepsie, on December 14, 2011, 10.05am Eastern Time, it stood at 22,643,223 hits.

What goes into the making of a meme? What makes a song, a video or a blog-post, a linguistic-cultural form, move from where it was created and displayed, to other sites and places, to be re-displayed, and seen, heard or read again and again? I am assuming that what makes a Tamil-English song move from Chennai to Nagpur to Delhi to Minneapolis includes, among other things, corporate strategies and marketing savvy. That how a linguistic-cultural form moves speaks to already existing pathways on which it is set in motion. But are there also more internal features, particular to that which is being circulated? In the case of *Kolaveri*, I could see that in addition to a catchy tune there was enough English to make it understandable to an audience that exceeded Tamil speakers, even if the English had a Tamil-Telugu twist to its endings; maybe that additional twist only enhanced its appeal—in the touristic sense of "same, same but different"?

The issue of a catchy tune and touristic English tugs me away from the origins of social memes or the causes of their virality into an aspect of the encounter itself, into questions of reception. When we encounter a linguistic-cultural form that is familiar and yet foreign, what makes us do our homework about that form? What compels us to ask: I like the tune, but what does *Kolaveri, Kolaveri di* mean? It is this compulsion to learn more, to nudge oneself from the easily visible to the relatively invisible, from the English to the Tamil, from the audible to the inaudible that intrigues me politically. It is not just the initial reception of a word, a tune or a cultural form, but the desire it sets off to do one's homework on the foreign within the domesticated, on the un-masticated in something chewed many times over that fascinates me.

This concern with the homework on the foreign arises, at least partially, from another song I find myself humming lately; it is a compulsive tune for me, though not necessarily equally catchy or easily audible to others: the song of Telangana, a region within a province (Andhra Pradesh) within a nation-state (India). Who sings the nation-state? Ask Butler and Spivak.[1] "If we pause for a moment on the meaning of 'states' as the 'conditions in which we find ourselves,' then it seems we reference the moment of writing itself or perhaps even a condition of being upset, out of sorts:

what kind of state are we in when we start to think about the state?" (2007: 3). What kind of state am I in when I start to think about Telangana? What kind of state are millions of others in (somewhere near 35 million people live in that region) when they sing the songs of Telangana and situate themselves in India but want out of Andhra Pradesh?

In singing Telangana, I often hear myself, find myself, beginning with a quick tally of the suicides in its name (or attributed to that sign) so far: 800–1,000 suicides by now, including one in front of the Indian Parliament. Bodies entangled in ropes, scorched by fire and corroded by pesticide constitute a poignant and mournful opening into this issue. Inviting an entry into Telangana by offering the dead makes it difficult for a listener not to pay attention. More often than not my interlocutors seem to do a quick, self-critical take: how come so many people, especially students, have killed themselves and we have barely heard of this movement? The willful deaths of even distant others seem to provoke questions about the otherwise unfamiliar. This offers the hope of compelling some homework on the foreign, on the other that ignites itself, extinguishes itself, to light our path to some recognition of its pain, some awareness of the state in which it finds itself: what kind of state are we in when we start to think about the state of the other only when it is on fire? But this is also an opening that I find disturbing as an entry point.

The lyric of death, especially suicides by young people, furnishes, like touristic English, a minimal tune of international communication—one that subtitles, however poorly, an issue's global importance, its claim to be recognized as an event worthy of a hearing beyond its local confines. But I am disturbed by my reliance on it as well as its seeming effectiveness in gathering attention. Are deaths—killings, suicides, the violent destruction of bodies—the only compelling tune of global politics? Are we too well trained into reading the trans local significance of an issue only as an elementary function of the corpses that it stacks up or the pain it produces? Are deaths and tangible suffering the eye candy of global political thought?

Though I procure your attention with a dirge, a mournful tune, maybe even a self-critical one, how do I re-direct your gaze, your ears, away from the deaths and to the life and the vitality of the politics that surrounds and exceeds these deaths? Some 800 and more deaths, yes, but can we please also look at the 800 different ways in which a life of political creativity flourishes here?

Arturo Escobar (2008: 18) urges us, in relation to social movements, to "read [listen?] for difference rather than domination." But how do we as theorists of the international, touts of the foreign, learn to see and hear beyond the obvious borders of difference? How do we tell the stories of

political life, of other "immeasurably equal" (Skaria 2010: 215) polities, when our heuristics, our standard measures of politics, strap us to the viral and the touristic?

I click "like" and share *Kolaveri Kolaveri di* with my 122 friends on FB. I play it to my kids. I push its virality. But what must I do, what can I do, to push the vitality of a political struggle where there is a difference beyond the always already recognizable boundaries of difference in international relations? How must I narrate, how must I mediate the relation between the English and the Telugu, the visible and the opaque, the global of international relations and the local of Telangana? And why must I? What is it about Telangana that compels me to narrate it into international relations, to sing it, and to persuade my listeners to hear what is not audible to otherwise globally attuned ears?

Tuning in

In narrating Telangana, I cannot pretend to objectivity. Many from Andhra Pradesh (from the three regions of Telangana, Rayalaseema and Andhra) who read this also cannot but frame and locate the voices here within their own inherited narratives of each other's likely solidarities. This has less to do with personal knowledge and more to do with a widespread politico-cultural literacy in the signs that name and condense social actors in these regions into specific historical trajectories. I do not seek, in these pages, to deny the validity of that casting. Nor do I see a need to accept it as somehow fully determinative. What I do wish to do is to self-consciously acknowledge and recognize that my narrative position (simplified sometimes to Reddy or not) is always already caught in other local narrations.

Over the years, those other histories have often jolted and disrupted me, productively. One of my earliest memories is of walking back from school with a dear friend who, somewhere along the way, in between conversations, abruptly asked me why that tag—Reddy—decorated my name, whether I did not know how offensive it was to someone like him. I did not know that till then, or, at least, I did not know him and me in the way that he clearly knew about him and me. But there's something profoundly educative about having a piece of a relationship that is invisible to you, or taken for granted, being ripped off unceremoniously and handed back, slightly bloody and torn. It is difficult to put that part back on un-problematically. It sticks out or stays out of joint, not least in the contours of the imagined self.

In college, I remember being asked, in the midst of student elections, why I was not campaigning for and voting with the Reddy lobby.

Ignorantly fresh from a Jesuit school where cultures mixed promiscuously, this query educated me into a new topography, one in which my social affiliations and political interests were already visible, marked and read off a highly nuanced grid. That interpretive grid continues into the present, in many ways, as a heuristic for reading the politics of the region and the province.

There are more troubling social histories: Reddy in the politics of the local social translates many a time into *dora*. *Dora* is articulated with control over land, exploitative agrarian hierarchies and atrocities. The title of one of the more instructive historical works on Telangana sums it up well. Inukonda Thirumali's book (2003) is called *Against Dora and Nizam: People's Movement in Telangana 1939–1948*. *Dora* is what the people want to get rid of, to kill if necessary; it is an anti-people subject position. One of the more popular sayings in the current Telangana movement essentially reiterates that what is wanted is not a *Dorala Telangana* (a Telangana of the *Doras*) but a *Prajala Telangana* (People's Telangana). My friend and walking, still talking, companion from school, an ardent advocate of Telangana, asked me more recently: "But you know that the biggest losers from a separate Telangana would be the Reddys?" Behind that question was a healthy skepticism of how far any one always already traced as a Reddy would stray from the long-term interests of their caste.

Other narrations thus modulate me. This is a process that I have some understanding of but cannot claim much control over, especially any control that would allow me to pitch my claims on some more neutral, seemingly objective or transcendental ground. I hope not to be too out of tune with these other social histories, but I cannot be certain of that. What I wish to claim, though, is that it is in the intimacy and the foreignness, the postcolonial English and the Dakhni-Telugu of an awkwardly sutured self, that the languages of international relations and the songs of Telangana come to life in me. Mellifluous or grating, poetic or prosaic, personal and political, they constitute a compulsive presence that I have no choice but to voice somehow. If Telangana is a struggle between the *dora* and the *praja*, then, in however modest a fashion, it is a struggle that fractures me too, a struggle that is both familiar and foreign, intimate and yet alien.

Songs in motion

If, as Robert Frost tells us, "Poetry is what is lost in translation,"[2] it is that likely loss of the poetic that haunts my effort to narrate Telangana into international relations. There are many accounts of various aspects

of this movement—accounts that convey the events, the history, the politics and economics in some fashion or another.[3] But to read them is to miss the idiomatic, to be numb to the freshness, the creativity and the vitality of the Telangana movement. In much of the scholarly and journalistic commentary, the poetic-idiomatic dimension is either ignored or relegated to the realm of the "emotional" and the "sentimental." Politics and political analysis, it appears, is about the reasoned dissection of events and causes, and personalities and their motivations. But the Telangana movement and its politics are so constituted through the idiomatic that I am unsure of how to carry across my translations of the vernacular.

One aspect of this is audible in a story narrated by Gummadi Vittal Rao, also known as Gaddar: a people's poet (*praja kavi*), known revolutionary, once "underground" as a Maoist/Naxalite, now leading a People's Front for Telangana. In an interview, Gaddar recounted how the police would arrest him when he was involved in mobilizations in rural areas.[4] But once in their custody, they would also want him to sing for them, sing the very songs that mocked the police, the politicians and the state! Gaddar sings songs that also mock *doras*, make fun of them and their oppressive practices in Telangana. And yet, many *dora* families find themselves pulled into listening to and singing these very songs, songs that critique and condemn them in alluringly intimate words.

I wonder if the intimacy of Gaddar's songs pre-occupy the police and the *doras*, and in and through that poetic inhabitation facilitate a concrete critique. Even in ordinary talk about Naxalites, about a rebellious Padmakka who might have been sighted at a village wedding after initially having gone "underground," the discourse is not about a monstrous other (the archetypal "terrorist") as much as an intimate other that, like someone who has returned from a long stay abroad, exhibits new habits but is not entirely bereft of older ones. The Naxalite/Maoist/rebel/insurgent is thus a figure of familiarity and foreignness, with the "underground" serving as an "international" place, a space of migration and social transformation. The insurgent/rebel does not evoke horror or terror as much as a mix of familiarity and strangeness, of old rhythms and new steps. It is these multiple layers to political life, layers of the international in the domestic, layers that are constitutive of critical as well as banal encounters, that I hope to draw out more in what follows.

It is also in such encounters, encounters between the state apparatus and the people and their poets, encounters in which the state wants to contain the people but also wants to hear their songs—maybe even wants them to be a people singing to the future—that much of Indian politics takes place.[5] An encounter, like Telangana, is also a "song in motion"

(adapting Gluck and Tsing, 2009), a distinctly forged linguistic-cultural form in Indian democratic politics.

Encounters

On December 11, 2008, *The Hindu* reported:

> In a ghastly incident, two girl students of KITS [Kakatiya Institute of Technology and Sciences] engineering college were attacked with acid by motorcycle-borne miscreants when they were returning home on a scooter here on Wednesday. K. Swapnika was badly injured while her friend T. Praneetha (21) sustained severe burns.

The newspaper went on to note that the police were "searching for Srinivas, a neighbour of Swapnika, and for possible accomplices." Meanwhile, the father of Swapnika blamed the police for not taking "sufficient action against Srinivas" who had been "harassing his daughter for long, seeking her love." He told reporters that when he had "warned him to desist from such harassment, Srinivas burned his two-wheeler one night to intimidate his family."

Put on the defensive, one of the top police officials in the district, the Superintendent of Police, V.C. Sajjanar, after visiting the two women in hospital, noted that they had arrested the suspect, Srinivas, before this incident and had even "remanded him without any delay," but he had been released on bail. After this, Srinivas had, according to V.C. Sajjanar, "stopped harassing the girl" only to resort, "this time," to "revenge by throwing acid on the girl." He promised to "arrest him at the earliest."

This event gathered a lot of attention, partly because it followed a series of similar attacks on women in other parts of the state. The news of the incident went all the way up to the Chief Minister of the State, Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy, who "expressed shock at the attack" and said "that the government [would] bear the cost of treatment for the injured students." But, more ominously, he also "directed the police to take stern action against the accused."[6]

On Saturday, December 13, 2008, *The Hindu* reported Swapnika as "display[ing] rare courage and spirit" and also as "demand[ing] stern action against the perpetrator of [the] dastardly acid attack." It noted that, "Her grief stricken parents and relatives directed their ire at the State for its failure to provide protection to women and girl students." It also noted:

> Forty eight hours after the acid attack which left her grievously burnt, the girl's continuous refrain in a voice that was surprisingly

> clear and strong was "I want justice. He and his parents should suffer the way I and my parents are suffering. My request to government is to hang him so that no one would dare to perpetrate such acts. He harassed me for months."[7]

The Chief Minister's call for "stern action," followed by Swapnika's demand for "stern action" and "justice," was also echoed by some political parties, unions and organizations. For example, *The Hindu* of December 12, 2008 reported that[8]:

> Members of several student unions and women in large numbers from various political parties joined the protests across the district demanding punishment to the accused S. Srinivas whose acid attack on two bright engineering girl students maimed them. Women from different walks of life *demanded that the accused be hanged or shot* to ensure such incident does not recur. Telugu Nadu Students Federation (TNSF) leader Bhukya Sambaiah said two innocent girls K. Swapnika and T. Praneetha were severely injured due to the act of a psycho. "This badly reflects on the other students. He *should be encountered immediately at the very spot* to send a strong message," he said. Shocked and deeply perturbed at the incident, girl students in large numbers came out of their colleges in [order] to register their protest and demanding SP V C Sajjanar to *take strong action against the accused to instil fear* among other such youth.

What emerged from the outrageous attack were calls from various sections of society as well as the administration for "stern action," "exemplary punishment," a legal boycott of the accused by the local Bar Association, as well as calls for good "medical treatment" of the injuries suffered by the two women students.

In a matter of hours, the police arrested the three men who were then presented to the public. In one of the photos covering this press event, you see the Superintendent of Police (SP), V.C. Sajjanar, with the three accused behind him. The caption underneath reads: "Anti-social elements: Warangal SP V.C. Sajjanar parading the accused in the acid attack case in Warangal on Friday." The news report pointed out that the accused Srinivas was "unrepentant." A day later, on December 14, 2008, it was reported widely that the three accused youths had been killed in an "alleged encounter":[9]

> S. Srinivasa Rao and his two associates, B. Sanjay and P. Hari Krishna, the prime accused in the gruesome acid attack on two girl

> students, were killed in an alleged encounter with police near here early on Saturday.
>
> Hours after being produced before the media here when they confessed to their crime, the three were shot dead at Mamnoor village, 15 km from here. Superintendent of Police V. C. Sajjanar said that the incident occurred when a team of officers took the trio to the spot to recover the two-wheeler stolen from the Kakatiya Institute of Technology and Sciences (KITS).
>
> In the cover of darkness, they picked up a small container of acid, a country-made weapon and knives hidden near the stolen vehicle and attacked the police, he said. The police then whipped out their weapons and shot them. The bodies were found in a pool of blood in bushes close to the Mamnoor airstrip.[10]

The news-reports pointed out that the "encounter" evoked "mixed reactions." Some "hailed" it, some were "guarded," while others cried "foul." When questioned on how the accused, who were in custody, could attack the police, the Home Minister said that an inquiry had been ordered into it and that the report (by the Director General of Police) would "reveal the truth."

Forging a form

When you read about an encounter in Indian papers, you already have some knowledge about the "shadows"[11] that surround that event. You understand that this "encounter," this "unexpected meeting," was quite likely "staged," that the police had probably already seized the suspects somewhere before, interrogated and then executed them.[12] The subsequently released story, the press conference, the display of the encounter site as well as the bodies with weapons near them, the side story of injuries sustained by the police, are all, to draw on an old Hindi movie about the police, "ardh satya" (half-truths). Those words speak to the half-truths of one world while gesturing all the time at the truths of another world that looms in the shadows. Those familiar with the languages of Indian politics understand this.

The state is bi-lingual in these instances. It says, explicitly, in one tongue: this is what happened; an encounter took place. It knows, and knows that others know, the translation. The organizations for the defense of civil liberties know that. The press knows that. So do the critics and commentators on television. And thus it comes about that, while human rights advocates and civil liberties organizations document and condemn the extra-judicial killings pointing to the unconstitutional

and dangerous political implications of allowing "fake encounters," the Indian media stages the debate "neutrally" and reports criticisms and defenses. The terms of the debate that are explicitly articulated constitute, one could say, the English dimension, the liberal language of Indian politics. It is what the state sings as its expected song in terms of the Indian Constitution; it is how it wishes to appear to domestic and international civil societies to fulfill expectations of its democratic, sovereign rule.

And then there are the undertones, the accents, those hints of other languages, other tongues that we also know but do not explicitly articulate. It is a common awareness of those other languages that allows one, well before the event of encounter itself, to "wish it," to wish a particularly imagined future event, into existence:

> Telugu Nadu Students Federation (TNSF) leader Bhukya Sambaiah said two innocent girls K. Swapnika and T. Praneetha were severely injured due to the act of a psycho. "This badly reflects on the other students. He should be encountered immediately at the very spot to send a strong message," he said.

Public debate on "encounters" in Indian politics constitutes a struggle across these conceptually separate worlds. The debate rages as if the point was to overcome the limitations of liberal democratic politics in India. Advocates of civil liberties try to put the state on the mat for being hypocritical and for not living up to its constitutional responsibilities. Defenders of the state invoke a discourse of national security, terrorism and law to justify a state of exception and "stern action" on issues which they also know are never just issues of terrorism or security but also socio-economic and political. To put civil liberties advocates on the defensive, they will ask why is it that such organizations don't defend "innocent" and "ordinary people" against the violence of the "Maoists" and "terrorists." Each points to a lack in the other in terms of a shared liberal democratic framework while aware that they are also operating in another political order, whose existence is understood, even if it is not always available for explicit articulation.

Of course, I would not want to deny the importance of such a critical perspective, however limited, or its necessity in safeguarding the legitimacy of the constitutional order itself or putting some effective limits on the state's conception of what it can and cannot do. But, as with many other political practices in India, what does one do with the widely shared recognition that these shadows are considerably thick and varied enough to constitute and hide another world; that this is a realm of state and public action that is commonly understood; and that in different

ways, to be conversant in Indian politics is to be familiar with those other economic, political and social practices. Should one, maybe, think of this as the language of exceptions, the domain of illiberality, of an implicit extra-constitutional order, of what *must* be done, how things *must* be handled, if one is to be politically, economically, socially, effective in a place called "India"? Is this the realist underpinning to the liberal domestic order?

From an international relations perspective, some of the keywords of Indian politics—corruption, commissions of enquiry, castes—consist of similar bi-lingual presentations, that, in functioning on at least two planes, combine the local and the foreign, the brightly visible and the shadowy, what is said and what is understood to have been said. Unlike liberalism, this other political language does not have a written grammar or explicitly laid out rules, but the practitioners and commentators of Indian politics know it and speak it. I, like many others, feel and sense this materially, but wonder about how to bring it to bear on a reading of Telangana. How do the multiple half-truths, that never make only one world, come together within this issue? How does its visible Telugu-ness, its particularities, shadow the truths of other domains?

Political economy as a cultural encounter

In a nuanced critique of both international political economy and cultural studies, David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah argue that political economy is always a cultural project, that this "cultural constitution of political economy" is ignored by economists and their critics alike and that, as a result, the ambiguities (the benefits and wounds) generated by wealth creation are ignored by both (2010: 15).

What, then, does it mean to study the "cultural constitution of political economy"? Blaney and Inayatullah observe:

> An investigation of the cultural constitution of political economy involves exploring an identity formation that splits self and other. It also requires articulating the transgressive vision that lies within the necessary overlap of self and other. We find in this space the modern "West's" most sacred and enduring social and political ideals, its greatest fears and anxieties, and potentially powerful alternative visions of social and political life. Exploring this terrain also means recognizing that *political economy is a cultural encounter*.
>
> (2010: 16)

Blaney and Inayatullah write their critique against the texts and contexts of the discipline of International Relations (IR) and International

Political Economy. Hence, it is understandable that they focus on "the West" and its production and definition of a "savage other" as a constitutive outside. In this "Western" context and against the background of standard IR texts, they point out, correctly in my reading, that "the West" constructs itself, in part, through the discipline of political economy. Political economy as theory and practice comes into being through a self-idealization of the West as wealthy, modern and civilized (2010: 15). This idealization splits the West from others who are deemed poor, backward and savage.

This idealization—the West as wealthy, modern and civilized—comes together through the category of reason. The West does not deny the wealth of other times and other civilizations. But, unlike that other fabled wealth, the West is "reasonably wealthy," i.e. it is wealthy through the systematic and deliberate application of reason (rather than being wealthy in reasonable measure). Political economy is that reason. It is this constitutive relationship between reason and wealth that allows the West then to lay claim to modernity and civilization.

Drawing on Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work, Blaney and Inayatullah argue that, in the West, anthropology comes to fill "the Savage slot" while the "Utopian slot" is filled by political economy. They point out:

> We might say that political economy's role within the field of significance of the "West" reveals it to be less a discipline analyzing the commonality and variety of human experience and more a political/cultural project that is an effect of this splitting of self and other; a kind of splitting where, nevertheless, the disowned elements of the self remain essential to its very construction. In this sense, political economy is always a global project, encompassing a universal vision though imagined in relation to certain repressed but constitutive others.
>
> (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010: 17)

In other words, political economy is a cultural encounter in the sense that in this encounter what is articulated explicitly—the language of utopian political economy—also invokes and gestures towards another (repressed but constitutive) world, the language of savage culture.

Following Blaney and Inayatullah, I want to ask: What is the cultural constitution of political economy in the case of India (more specifically, the province of Andhra Pradesh) that leads to the systematic production of one of its regions, Telangana, as occupying the "savage slot," while another of its regions, Andhra, comes to occupy and represent the "utopian slot" (and what is "progressive" and "modern" culturally)?

In doing this, in focusing on India and Andhra Pradesh, I begin, then, with "a field of significance" that is not, in its immediate manifestations at least, *only* "of the West." The "cultural-political project" that leads to the formation of Andhra Pradesh and the reconfiguration of India on linguistic lines[13] is one that does not begin self-consciously, in terms of its texts or contexts, as a "global project," nor even as a "national" one, but emerges as a "regional" one. I begin, therefore, with a context and with texts that self-consciously constitute themselves as "local" and "regional" and yet have become, over the years, intense sites of "wealth creation" along with the ambiguities and wounds that those processes bring about.

Now I understand that, following Ashis Nandy, and Inayatullah and Blaney, "the West is everywhere" (Muppidi 2004). But I also believe that it is not only the West that is there in other places, but that there are "other cultures," self-consciously "provincial," that are also engaged in "projects of political/cultural management" intimately connected to the accumulation of wealth. These local/regional spaces, even as they engage with the West, have their own distinctive idioms and grammars that are not simply reducible to the rational logic of an already given Western template—reducible that is without losing the poetry.

It is here that I move away, temporarily maybe, from Blaney and Inayatullah's focus on and critique of how "economy and culture are often set in opposition" (2010: 18–24). This is not because I disagree with their critique but because, at my "local" site of analysis, both the "utopian slot" and the "savage slot" are already occupied by a strongly provincial "Teluguness" that concedes little to the West in terms of culture. The issue then is not just to "recogniz[e] that political economy is a cultural encounter," as Blaney and Inayatullah (2010: 18) urge us, but also to recognize distinctively that regional (in this case Telugu) cultural projects are also politico-economic encounters.

Who sings the region, the song of Teluguness, then? What is the promised utopia in *Maa Telugu Talliki*, the official song of Andhra Pradesh?[14] How do the songs of Telangana interrupt that utopian singing?

Savage Telangana

Telangana is a word, a world and bodies in emotion. It is a vernacular world that lies in the shadows of the postcolonial scholar's orbits.

It is difficult to enter that world through the Indian postcolonial's English or through her languages of liberal politics. English tends to "flatten" that world, as does the scholarly prose of modern economics and politics. As Dilip Menon (2006: 3), drawing on Vivek Dhareshwar, points out:

> [T]he desire of the Indian postcolonial elite to be modern has worked within the progressive narrative of liberal humanism. Self-fashioning is seen as the result of a jettisoning of ethnic, linguistic, caste and other markers to attain the abstract identity of the individual citizen. To this end, the postcolonial elite in India has used English, both as language as much as a "semiotic system symbolizing modernity," to impose their secular categories on the social world. This modern subjectivity, framed in English, has allowed caste to be approached only at one remove, as something restricted to the private domain suffused with the vernacular. English has acted as a "meta-language" with reference to caste and other "traditional" practices; those who appropriate English claim a subject position free from caste and religious markings. The public sphere is narrowly constructed as the sphere governed by secular categories.

Telangana teaches you that the Indian postcolonial's limitations in seeing *the local in the local* may be the limits of encounters framed solely through the mediation of English. Moving beyond English, knowing Telugu, the "local" language, gets you a seat at the window but you are still an outsider, and if you speak your Telugu *properly*, probably the consummate outsider because there are multiple Telugus and their mutual encounters are politically and culturally and economically charged affairs.

On e-telangana, one of the many sites devoted to Telangana on the blogosphere, there is a list that identifies words in Telangana Telugu and their equivalents in Andhra Telugu, to work with an encounter between two types of Telugu. *Neellu* in Telangana Telugu is *Neeru* in Andhra Telugu, it informs us. There is no third term, Water, mediating this encounter in the list. Nor is there, as Chakrabarty (2000: 83, 85) might warn us to be alert to, a seemingly transcendent H_2O claiming to be a real and superior definition of both. This is an internecine dispute that involves multiple translations among life-worlds. And the culture, politics and economy of water is central in many ways to this battle, from whether you say *Neeru* or *Neellu*, to where it comes from, how it is channeled and where it is made to flow or not flow.[15]

I entered the world of Telangana from the lowest possible level, the roughest form of language: vulgarity. When I first heard one of the political leaders of Telangana, K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR as he is called locally), laying out the distinctions between vulgarities in Telangana Telugu and those in Andhra Telugu, when I first saw it on YouTube, I was appalled and delighted at the same time.[16] He had been accused of using "unparliamentary language," and holding a press

conference on the nuanced distinctions between *our* vulgarities and *their* vulgarities was his unabashed response. There was more politics in that response, in the form of that response, than I had come to expect from the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, though it was not for want of vulgarity in other respects.

That lesson from KCR in distinguishing comparative vulgarities was liberating; it was a refreshingly powerful call against the insidious sacralization of multiple hierarchies. In the battle between *Neellu* and *Neeru*, this was a reduction of the high and mighty, an equalization of *Neeru's* historical attempt to assert not just a difference but also a hierarchy between the various Telugus, between their Telugu (as the standard) and our Telugu (as the deviant, the lack). But that brief excursus into comparative vulgarities—that diminishing to the common, to the ordinary, to the people—brought both terms down to the popular, and there was suddenly the possibility of re-starting the dialogue on fairer, more equal, grounds. This was the reconstitution of an "us" and a "them" that would, productively, demean both.

Vulgarity, in this more archaic sense, also came alive in the Telangana movement and brought hundreds of common people (characterized as lacking taste, culture, education and other such refinements) onto the streets and into the public, chanting, singing, dancing: Telangana, Telangana, Telangana. Politics made sense and was now public and accessible to the vulgar. You could speak, without shame, in public as you normally spoke only in your private realms: *Neellu! Neellu! Neellu!*

If the dominant form of globalization in Andhra Pradesh was from very early on about privatization, about the enclosure of that which was common—the appropriation of *neellu*, land, minerals—then the Telangana movement was a vulgar rejection of that refined culture, a rejection by the common and the ordinary of all those high-walled enclosures. It was about a re-staking of claims to the commons: a taking-back of language, land, water, culture, history, politics and the state. Split the state in order to renew a claim to the commons. Reject the dominance of a cultural identity in order to re-situate oneself in the emerging political economy.

Other hitherto private acts spilled into the public realm. Cooking was no longer a private act as the kitchens came out into the streets. It was called *vanta-vaarpu*. July 2011 saw some *vanta-vaarpu*. On such days, large numbers of people trooped into public spaces with their kitchen utensils and cooked and ate together. Newsprint in Hyderabad, increasingly devoted to which model or socialite was coming or going out of which night club, had to waste itself showing images of common, ordinary activists cooking and feasting on the roads, quite unglamorously. And they looked indecently happy.

Telangana as a word and a world in motion could be discerned in the shadows, seen, if you could find your way through the vulgar vernacular. But to the English-speaking Indian postcolonial and the high-cultured Telugu, this was a betrayal of the new light dawning on Hyderabad and on Andhra Pradesh.

Poetic form

A word in motion, aesthetic motion, gathers a lot of politics. It generates a momentum that can destabilize existing fixities. Listening to the debates on Telangana, it is fascinating to see what fixities, what materialities, this roiling word, Telangana, unsettles. Professor Kodandaram, an important advocate of the movement, and a teacher of political science at Osmania University, Hyderabad, one of the main centers for the movement, speaks about how repressive the political climate was in rural Telangana before the latest phase of this struggle. In a speech to the *Telangana Vidyavanthula Vedika* (Telangana Educationists Forum),[17] he talks about how, around 2004, people in Telangana villages were simply not in a position to even discuss publicly with each other their shared problems. That ordinary act required a lot of courage. Whenever they met, as part of the Human Rights Forum and civil liberties organizations to discuss how people in Telangana villages responded to their efforts to gather facts about "encounters," the situations would seem both painful and poignantly humorous at the same time. Even when the people killed in encounters were really close to them, possibly even their relatives, those directly affected would, though they were clearly full of sorrow, pretend not to know what had happened: "I believe that some police came, there was some disturbance and some people died but I don't know really since, on that day, I had gone to my in-laws; but you can talk to him, sir," and they would point to the person next to them, who would, in turn perform the same charade. "That's very true, sir. He wasn't there. But I wasn't there either. I had to go to the market for some work. But you should ask this fellow." He would then show the third person as a potential witness who would, in turn, say: "I wasn't there either. I had to go to the hospital because my kid was not well." Everyone knew what had occurred, everyone understood, but everyone also understood that they should not talk about it. The fear of state reprisal was so intense that you could be traveling in a bus or train and people would talk sympathetically to you about this or that all the way through but only when they were getting off would they whisper their true opinions on a troubling issue. That, according to Professor Kodandaram, was the nature of the repressive silence in Telangana in 2004.

What this repressive atmosphere, in which talk about human rights violations took place in banal generalities, meant was that any public complaint about even seemingly domestic, personal or civil society issues (such as dowry deaths or electricity bills) was difficult because those complaints were likely to be read as superficial symptoms, emblematic signs, of another, more radical/revolutionary, politics ("Are you a Naxalite? Are you being instigated by others as a way of generating unrest?").

In this context, Prof. Kodandaram narrates an incident where, after discussing a set of issues concerning the injustice done to Telangana, the people who were gathered agreed to form a local committee to take up only the very specific issue of why there was no hospital in their town, and were going to call it the People's Committee of Telangana, when one of the participants seemed startled and said: "Everything is very good, but why are you saying 'people' again, sir?! They will call us a part of the 'People's War Group' and beat us." Marking something as a People's Committee, invoking the name of the People, discussing issues concerning common problems, meant trouble with the state authorities. Such discursive actions were likely to be read as a front, as only a cover, for a more insidious revolutionary politics and likely therefore to invite too close and repressive an attention—in the form of harassment, beatings, and lock-ups—from the local administration.

But even in a changed situation in which, after a lot of political mobilization, the silence had been disrupted and it was possible to discuss publicly various issues regarding Telangana, Prof. Kodandaram argues that it is crucial to be vigilant because the situation could change any time. It was also crucial that protest actions be vigilantly non-violent since a colonial administration rules through violence and repression and would use any violence on the protestors' part as an excuse to brutally suppress the whole movement. Drawing explicitly on Frantz Fanon's characterization of the nature of a colonial regime and characterizing the ruling regime in Andhra Pradesh as a (settler) colonial one (*valasapalana*), Prof. Kodandaram argues the importance of working democratically and within the existing political parameters to take the movement forward.

Listening to him articulate this position, one sees how the Telangana movement's political practices have to not only break through a blanket of silence and banal generalities but also stop short of any violent manifestation, even if the violence was of a reactive sort to structural oppression. If politics has to be framed within these limits, if they have to perform and persuade vast collectivities within these parameters, then words have to be in very creative motion. Words must sing, must dance,

must make you sing and dance and thus persuade and compel an imaginative change in the cartographic borders that currently limit the imagination of millions of people.

Words in motion are thus charged with the ethical responsibility of re-drawing existing borders within a nation-state. Granted, these re-drawings are not as politically contentious as the sovereign borders of an existing nation-state. Granted, that in a constitutional set-up like India's they are even legitimized through the law. And yet, such an encounter must rework culture, must rework political economy, and must rework long-standing wounds wrought about by wealth creation (or its neglect), without necessarily creating new ones. It is not surprising then that the second most important word that seems often to come from the lips of the movement is *spandana (*response, reaction, feeling, vibration).[18] It is almost as if the movement believes that its words in motion will generate a political reaction, a response, a vibration in the others around, that will yield a new map, a new locale of freshly imagined possibilities. But that presumes that those around will hear this song of the region and be intrigued enough to do their homework, do enough work on the state of their home, to be able to respond ethically, outside of banal generalities or violent suppression.

Who sings and who is tuned in, then? How do the songs of the regions resonate or not with the song of the postcolonial state?

Notes

1 Butler, Judith and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007.
2 Sutherland, John. *How Literature Works: 50 Key Concepts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
3 See, for example: Bhushan, M. Bharath and N. Venugopal. *Telangana: The State of Affairs*. Telangana: AdEd Value Ventures, 2009; Simhadri, S. and P.L. Vishweshwer Rao. *Telangana: Dimensions of Underdevelopment*. Hyderabad: Centre for Telangana Studies, 1997.
4 See "Open Heart with RK: Gaddar," www.youtube.com/watch?v=DspluIGq-VU.
5 "What does it mean to be at once contained and dispossessed by the state? And what does it mean to be uncontained or discontinued from the state but given over to other forms of power that may or may not have state-like features?" (Butler and Spivak, 2007: 5–6).
6 "Acid Attack on Two Girls in Warangal," *The Hindu*, December 11, 2008, www.hindu.com/2008/12/11/stories/2008121154150400.htm.
7 "Swapnika Battles for Life, Justice," *The Hindu*, December 13, 2008, www.hindu.com/2008/12/13/stories/2008121359750800.htm
8 "Acid Attack on Two Girl Students Decried," *The Hindu*, December 12, 2008. www.hindu.com/2008/12/12/stories/2008121252240300.htm. Emphasis added.

9 Srinivasa Rao, Gollapudi. "Acid-attack Accused Shot Dead," *The Hindu*, December 14, 2008, www.hindu.com/2008/12/14/stories/2008121459690800.htm; Siddique, Mohammed. "AP: Youths Accused in Acid Attack Killed in Encounter," *Rediff India Abroad*, www.rediff.com/news/2008/dec/13-youths-accused-in-acid-attack-killed-in-encounter.htm; Gollapudi Srinivasa Rao, "People Support Naxalism for Instant Justice," *The Hindu*, June 3, 2011 www.hindu.com/2011/06/03/stories/2011060354420700.htm.
10 Srinivasa Rao, Gollapudi. "Acid-attack Accused Shot Dead," *The Hindu*, December 14, 2008, www.hindu.com/2008/12/14/stories/2008121459690800.htm.
11 Gluck, Carol, and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.
12 See Janyala, Sreenivas. "In Cold Blood," *The Indian Express*, December 22, 2008, www.indianexpress.com/news/in-cold-blood/401146/0.
13 On the reconfiguration of India on linguistic lines, see Brass, Paul R. *The Politics of India Since Independence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
14 "State Anthem Composed in Chittoor." *The Hindu*, www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/article1566396.ece.
15 On the politics of water see articles in Simhadri, S. and P.L. Vishweshwer Rao (1997).
16 "KCR Differentiating Telangana and Andhra language," www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IQN8dGutg0.
17 "Telangana: Prof. Kodandaram Speech in T.V.V. Meeting," www.youtube.com/watch?v=6A3c0BzCH24&feature=related.
18 I owe this observation to discussions with Chris Chekuri.

2 Colonial concerts

> A world compartmentalized, Manichaean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge.[1]
>
> (Fanon 2004)

"What kind of death does the Native dread?" The question dogs me as I tread gingerly through a nineteenth-century British soldier's memoir. It is not altogether a strange question to be asking in a week and month devoted to incessant and sensational coverage, by the US media, of the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. My question endures also because the soldier, Timothy Gowing, has a specific answer to it in his recounting of an "execution parade" during the 1857 Indian "Mutiny."[2]

The event that Gowing narrates is not just an execution—the carrying out of a judgment requiring the killing of someone—or a parade—a coordinated and public display of bodies—but an instructive spectacle of both: the public organization, display and carrying out of death as punishment:

> Sir Sidney Cotton was determined to make an example of some of these *would-be murderers*, and for the information of the reader I here attempt to describe an execution parade. … It was truly an imposing scene: all the troops in garrison, both European and Native, armed and disarmed, loyal and disloyal, were drawn up on parade, and formed up carefully in three sides of a square, but so arranged that any attempt on the part of the disloyal to rescue the doomed ringleaders from the hands of justice would be met with a terrible slaughter.
>
> (1892: 316, emphasis added)

Gowing shows the care that has gone into the construction of this "imposing scene." Both Europeans and Natives ("armed and disarmed,"

"loyal and disloyal") are part of the three sides of a square, but the square is not just any geometric-aesthetic arrangement but also a distribution of bodies-in-power. As a specific distribution of bodies-in-power, it negates, or is meant to contain, any efforts on the part of the relatively powerless Natives (the disarmed and the disloyal) to rescue the "would-be murderers"/"doomed ringleaders." Neither can they refuse to be there. They are expected to watch and learn what happens to "would-be murderers." It is an exercise in pre-emptive pedagogy, an open-air classroom.

Paradise lost

The exemplary and public spectacle of justice emerges out of a careful structuring of bodies-in-power and pedagogical space. It must be watched live, as it happens. To refuse to watch involves the risk of a greater disorder and destruction ("terrible slaughter"). This public instruction, this teaching of the public, in which justice emerges and is displayed spectacularly in its emergence (in which "justice is done," to remind ourselves of the words of US Presidents Obama and Bush[3]) is also a re-staging, a re-presentation, of how bodies are and ought to be related, of the just order of power. We are instructed in, taught publicly, the order of things.

Gowing describes what happens next in the execution parade that is also a classroom:

> The prisoners, under a strong European guard, after marching around the inside of the square, were formed up in rear of the guns; their crimes and sentences were read aloud to them, and at the head of each regiment; the first batch of ten or twelve were then marched up to the guns and their arms and legs tied—their arms being fastened to the wheels of the gun, and their backs placed against the muzzle, so that they could not move—and at a word or signal from an artillery officer the whole were launched into eternity.
>
> (1892: 317)

Contemplating eternity, one wonders about the mode of execution: Why would Sir Sydney Cotton use cannons to "launch" these mutinying soldiers "into eternity"? Why not hang or execute them with a firing squad? Would that not be enough to "launch them into eternity"? Why the disproportionate relationship between immobile men and body blasting cannons, between immovable bodies and the bloody manner of their destruction? What is this strange excess that appears in an otherwise well-orchestrated parade, a well-crafted lesson plan?[4]

In some other accounts of this period in Peshawar, in Sir Sydney Cotton's own account (1868), in accounts by his niece (Hope, 1900), this seemingly disproportionate relation, this spectacular mess, is either not mentioned or finessed.[5] But Gowing, whose book went into a number of editions, does not shy from a starker account. Let us read further to see if he offers any clues. He describes next the results of "launching" these soldiers "into eternity:"

> A horrid sight it was: a complete shower of human fragments—heads, arms, legs, and all parts of the body, being hurled into the air—and when the smoke cleared away there they lay, Hindoos and Mussulmen all mixed together. Ten or twelve more were then marched up to the guns, and in about two minutes the same horrible scene was repeated: and so it continued until all who had been sentenced met their doom.
>
> (1868: 317–318)

What then was the effect of this tell and show scene on the students: the writer, the gunners and the spectators?

> It makes one's blood run cold to recall the scene, but the *horrible atrocities committed* by these fiends left no room for pity in our hearts. A look of grim satisfaction could be traced on the gunners' faces after each salvo. But far different was the effect upon the Native portion of the spectators; their black faces grew ghastly pale at each salvo—as they gazed breathlessly upon the awful spectacle, they trembled from head to foot like aspen leaves, while some of them turned all kinds of unnatural hues. *This is the only death that a Native dreads.*
>
> (Ibid. emphasis added)

Gowing appears shaken by the "horrid sight." It makes his "blood run cold" to even remember it. But there was also a "grim satisfaction" and lack of "pity" for the "fiends" who had committed "horrible atrocities." (The "would-be murderers" have morphed into "horrible atrocities"-committing "fiends" in the course of a few paragraphs). The execution parade, a pre-emptive pedagogical spectacle, births justice and wisdom through a death that is terrifying; "would-be murderers" turned "fiends" who commit "horrible atrocities" meet a fate, in eternity, that they dread ("and when the smoke cleared away there they lay, Hindoos and Mussulmen all mixed together").

These "fragments" of "Hindoos and Mussulmen all mixed together," are served to two sets of pupils. Though both are "horrified" by what is offered, they absorb it from different locations. For the author, the

gunners and the "Europeans," the horror is layered with a sense of "satisfaction" or "pity" towards those blown up. They know, as Europeans, that they cannot be among the doomed and are free to either enjoy the Natives' fate or feel some humane concern towards them. The Natives are horrified too ("their black faces grew ghastly pale … some of them turned all kinds of unnatural hues") but their horror carries the fear of object-hood and substitutability, a visceral understanding that they are both students and instruction material in a colonial lesson plan. Their anxieties are different since their very humanness is at stake. The lesson infuses their bodies.

In the struggle between the British and the rebellious Native soldiers in 1857, the terms of political engagement included the question of desirable lives and dreaded deaths. By rebelling, the Natives seemed to show that they did not fear death, and that came as a challenge to those who governed through fear of death: what different death, what other kinds of death, were the Natives likely to fear, then? The realm of death is plundered for political value: ordinary death, death by hanging, death by musketry, a death that is truly horrifying; what is the death that is likely to have an effect on the rebellious imaginations of the Natives? Colonial governance is not only a question, then, as Achille Mbembe (2001: 250) might ask, of "How many times do I have to kill you," but also, "How do I kill you"? How do I kill you in ways that make you fear us, that make you dread us because of how we can kill you?[6] Doesn't death need to be married to terror and trembling if the Natives are to be governed? What is that form of terrifying death in the case of these mutineers?

> This is the only death that a Native dreads. If he is hung, or shot by musketry, he can have the funeral rites required by his religion; but by such a death as this he knows well that he will be blown to a thousand pieces, and that as Mussulmen and Hindoos are all mixed together there is no chance of his ever reaching Paradise.
>
> (Gowing 1892: 318)

A colonial discourse assumes that the Native's religion is what explains their actions, their willingness to suffer and struggle in worldly conflicts. If the Natives rebel and are willing to die, their resistance can be accounted for by their religion. And hence follows the desire to extend one's dominance to that sphere of religion itself—to contain or confront their religion—as a way of governing their earthly struggles. Messing with their paradise: there is something fiendishly clever about "mixing" Hindus and Muslims in death so as to sunder their solidarity in life. Not divide and rule but unite (in death) and terrorize.

An execution parade forges the politically proper relationships between the two sets of social bodies: between the terrorizing retributive power of the Europeans and the fiendish, atrocity-producing bodies of the Natives; the pitiless, orderly avenging of the European self against the shattered, scattered diminishing of the Native other ("trembling like aspen leaves"). But the parade also re-forms the assumed religious differences among the Hindus and the Muslims in order to deny them—or so it believes—their paradises in difference. It is by staging such events that bodies are brutally affixed into specific social locations and an order of colonial governance materializes. As Sir Sydney Cotton (1868: 175) notes in his memoirs:

> As affairs progressed, many instances of this kind [mutiny and desertion] occurred, and so long as the Europeans were equal to the duty, a general parade was held every Tuesday morning, at which the troops were compelled to witness rewards and punishments given and inflicted; rewards for acts of loyalty, and punishments for the great and prevailing crimes of the army. The news of these executions, and the mode adopted in carrying them into effect, spread far and wide, and even in the city of Cabul, itself, were the subjects of discussion and astonishment. It was clear to all that discipline was upheld and maintained (notwithstanding rumours to the contrary) amongst the troops, on the British frontier; .... Thus it may be truly said that the discipline of the British force was the discipline of the Border. Order prevailed, and the foot of legitimate authority was placed on the serpent's head.[7]

Paradise gained

But Sir Sydney Cotton was not alone in placing "the foot of legitimate authority on the serpent's head" and helping forge a colonial order.[8] Within his own family, nearly all his brothers were involved in this imperial task. As his niece, Lady Hope (1900: 8–11), notes in a biography of her father, Sir Arthur Cotton (Sydney Cotton's younger brother): "Arthur Cotton was not the only distinguished member of his family. Six of his brothers made their mark in their day, and did useful service for mankind." It was, she says, a veritable "band of brothers."

Seven in all in the band: Sydney, Charles, Arthur, Hugh, Frederick, Francis and Richard. Charles Conyers Cotton, "was for many years in Civil Service of India." Hugh Calvely Cotton "worked with his brother Arthur in the Irrigation Works, and eventually had the sole charge of the Kurnool Anicut." General Frederick Cotton, C.S.I. "was in the Royal

Engineers in India, and assisted his brother in the Tanjore, Godavari and other works, receiving the "Companionship of the Star of India in 1868 for his meritorious service in the Public Works Department." Only the roles of Admiral Francis Vere Cotton (who "retired early from his naval command") and Richard Lynch Cotton (who became the Provost of Worcester College in Oxford) in the imperial administration of India were relatively less direct. The niece cannot help noting, admiringly:

> It was an interesting sight to see these brothers together when they happened to meet, as they did occasionally, at some family gathering. They were a noble body of men, handsome, clever, brilliant in conversation; their callings were useful and without a blemish; not one of them had a personal enemy, so honourable had been their lives through all the vicissitudes of their different careers. Some of them, however, because of the strength and honesty of their convictions, had very determined opponents, Arthur in particular.[9]
>
> (Hope 1900: 11)

Determined opponents but no personal enemies for this "noble body of men," this "band of brothers," whose "callings were useful and without a blemish"; of course, how could it be otherwise, when those Native mutineers who were blown up could be seen as neither opponents nor enemies, just so many "serpents" to be crushed, a problematic part of the terrain that needed to be cleared up?

We learn, in the biography and through Sir Arthur Cotton's writings, that the determined opposition to him came from within the imperial administration and that it revolved around the question of whether Britain should invest in building railways or canals in India. Addressing himself to his countrymen in a series of papers, reports and presentations, Sir Arthur Cotton chided, pleaded and sought to persuade them to see what was so obvious to him: that Britain should invest in building canals, not railways and that the problems of colonial governance arose from Englishmen not appreciating their proper location and role in India.

Against the focus on revenue collection alone, Sir Arthur argued that the colonial administration must first develop the productive capacities of the land and then collect the (greater) revenue thus generated. But it is not the details of this debate that are important as much as the underlying problem that Sir Arthur identified with the colonial administration. After working through a series of claims of what kept India poor and what made England rich,[10] Sir Arthur bore in on the central issue: if India remained poor under British rule, it was because Englishmen were failing in something very basic to the whole enterprise. They were too

busy learning from the Natives instead of assuming their proper role as teachers:

> Now where is the difficulty? … Everything is ready except for *one thing*; but here we encounter *the* difficulty which has kept India immersed in its ignorance and poverty, from the day we commenced our rule up to this day. It is this: *that Englishmen instead of teaching the Natives of India the things which make us what we are, sit down to learn of the Natives the things that make them what they are*.
> (Cotton 1854: 52–53, emphasis in the original)

An India that was "immersed in its ignorance and poverty" was still being "governed," even under British rule, by "Native ideas." It thus continued to remain what it was, ignorant and poor, the presence of the English notwithstanding. The English did not understand that there was nothing to be learned from the Natives and that everything—including, most significantly, the Natives' own welfare—could be improved by following English/Anglo-Saxon ideas in India. Good governance meant that the English rulers not only thought for the Natives, but also taught them what made the English so very English ("*the things which make us what we are*"). Of course, Sir Cotton is graceful enough to concede that this was not necessarily because the Natives were not "intelligent" but because they were completely without the "advantages" that the Englishmen had.

> When the English begin to think for themselves, and bring their own Anglo-Saxon notions fairly to bear upon India, there will then be a wonderful change. A Native is by nature a very intelligent being, but he is utterly without our advantages. Imagine what a nation of Anglo-Saxons would be, who had not one single book worth reading in their language; and who had learnt nothing from books but drivellings such as are found in the Hindoo religious writings, which they themselves could see to be utter nonsense. And yet, such are the people we are content to learn from, instead of teaching them.
> (Cotton 1854: 11–12)

What does it mean to say of a people that they not only did not have a "single book worth reading in their language" but that even they—the Natives themselves—recognized the "utter nonsense" that was found in the books that they did have and had read? What Sir Arthur is implying is that the Native is not inherently stupid; he is intelligent enough to recognize that what he has access to, what he reads, is "utter nonsense." What this implies is that he is already a willing learner who desperately

needs a good teacher; he needs someone who can lead him away from these "drivellings," from this "utter nonsense" and give him access to books "worth reading." The Native's essential identity is that of a pupil, a willing student, eager to learn; he is ready to improve his inherited condition of being "immersed in ignorance and poverty." So it is unfair to force him to remain in this situation because the English mistakenly think that they have something to learn from him; this is especially troubling when it could so easily be otherwise, when this benighted situation could so readily be transformed through recognizing the Englishness of the English.

The Native sees the wretchedness of his condition and is willing to learn. The English do not realize the richness of their condition and hence are not prepared to be teachers/masters. So, in the interests of humanity, the humanity of the Natives, Englishmen have to step up to their duty and teach them how to live; not focus their efforts on learning from those who are ignorant and poor. When colonial government effects this switch, i.e. the moment when Englishmen accept their responsibility as teachers of the Natives rather than as learners from them, at that "moment … assuredly India will show a change like life from the dead." (Cotton 1854: 68). It is then that a livable life, a life not "immersed in ignorance and poverty," will begin for the Natives.

Schoolmasters of empire

If Sir Sydney Cotton crushed resistance to the colonial military order, Sir Arthur Cotton generated increased revenues for its treasury. Their different areas of competence notwithstanding, both the brothers were, to draw on the words that Lady Hope (1900) uses to describe Arthur Cotton, "empire makers" and "empire lovers." They sought, self-consciously, to repair the breaches and perfect the mechanisms of the British Empire.

> My father was truly an empire maker, as he was an empire lover; no one ever more zealously longed for the spread of England's civilisation, her privileges and her blessings over distant lands where, hidden too often behind the curtain of natural beauty, or surface intellectuality, there lies a hidden depth of misery and darkness, such as we, in our favored country, can scarcely know.
>
> (Hope 1900: viii)

Sir Arthur Cotton's imperial optic on irrigation, for instance, stretched from the canals of North America to Egypt to Australia. When he thought about India and Indian irrigation systems, it was as part of an imperial system of economic relations within which a better articulation of the

Indian economic space with that of Britain would not only enrich Britain but also allow it to free itself from the "slave grown cotton" of the US. It is in thinking and working within this imperial context that Alfred Deakin, the future Prime Minister of Australia, visited both the US and India to compare their irrigation systems and see what lessons could be drawn for the irrigation colonies he was sponsoring in Victoria, Australia. The Chaffee brothers, in the same period, moved from Canada, to Los Angeles, to Victoria, Australia to promote and participate in these irrigation colonies.[11]

Within this imperial framework, India and Indians appeared primarily as a materiality that must be shaped to the needs of a larger colonial project. The Natives, as part of this material landscape, were to be molded and affixed into their appropriate positions within the system. When Native welfare was secured, it was through a benevolence that regarded them as inferior beings (denizens of "distant lands where, hidden too often behind the curtain of natural beauty, or surface intellectuality, there lies a hidden depth of misery and darkness") incapable of autonomous civilized thought or action ("who had not one single book worth reading in their language; and who had learnt nothing from books but drivellings such as are found in the Hindoo religious writings, which they themselves could see to be utter nonsense"). The Natives needed to be colonized (ruled and guided) for their own welfare as well as the welfare of Britain. The condescending and benevolent aspect of colonial governance is captured well by what Lady Hope (1900: 224), drawing from Alfred Deakin's report on Indian irrigation, cites approvingly as the proper role of engineers, such as Sir Arthur Cotton, in imperial administration:

> In the heat and in the storm the engineers will stand to their posts, and flinch from no contest with flood, fever, or famine, or with the river which they master (as their Government masters this people), to prevent the ruin which must certainly follow if its great subject forces should ever master them.

Thus, if Sir Sydney Cotton was busy placing "the foot of legitimate authority on the serpent's head," Sir Arthur Cotton was equally busy "master[ing]" the rivers and not "flinch[ing]" from a "contest with flood, fever, or famine." Both understood well that colonial governance involved the mastery of Nature as well as the Natives.

Postcolonial resonance

October 1984. New Delhi. I remember standing, in a small group, outside a classroom on the old campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University

(JNU), where the School of International Studies was then located. We had just learnt that Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi had been shot by her bodyguards and rushed to a hospital. I don't recall the sequence of events clearly that day but I do remember going, later in the day, with a classmate to his house, which was in the same neighborhood as the Prime Minister's. Not much could be seen in terms of activity in the PM's house and I don't recall the details of the visit to my friend's house very vividly, but I do remember coming back in a bus, probably the 615, to campus. It was already night and pretty dark outside. What I also remember were streets with groups of people gathered around small fires on the roads, small fires and some overturned/burning scooters. The driver had turned off the lights in the bus and was racing through these scenes, as if in a hurry to finish his journey and get back to the depot. Even as he turned out the lights, I remember him asking a young Sikh boy (who had not stood out before) to hide behind the seats. He knew things that were only dimly emerging for me.

Just before the IIT-Delhi stop, the driver stopped the bus and the young boy stepped out (to what fate I will never know, but can only shudder to imagine, knowing what all happened that night). The bus moved on and, at the very next stop, a group of muscled men barged in. Their faces are hazy in my memory; it was still dark in the bus but I remember a rod in the hand of the leader and a question, laced with abuses, which he barked at the driver: Were there any Sikhs on the bus? This was a moment poised with all sorts of horrible possibilities and I had an acute sense of my watching mutely, dumbly, from the shadows of the darkly lit bus at this unfolding scene.

There were no Sikhs in the bus by this time and it was allowed to proceed. But the underlying structure of that scene—encasing, among other features, my dimness, my helplessness—has always haunted me. I have wondered often: what would I have done if those people had barged in one stop earlier? Would we have been able to stop those thugs from harming the boy? Would they have listened to us? I always knew, already, that this structured scene had been played many a time before in India. If it was not the Sikhs, it was someone else, Muslims, Dalits, South Indians, Women, North-Easterners, Hindus. Our positions were all inter-changeable. Where was the state, the state of my nationalist texts, on these dark nights and, many a time, brightly lit days? What was my state?

Inside the JNU campus, the faculty, students and workers were forming committees and taking on the task of guarding the outer perimeter of the campus to prevent any mobs from coming in. There were periodic rumors of this group or that group breaking into the campus to attack

Sikhs. I remember one functionary of the student wing of the ruling Congress party (NSUI—National Students Union of India) saying that he saw no reason why JNU, why the campus, should be an island when the whole city was burning. I was glad JNU was an island, one of many in the city. I was deeply appreciative of its intensely political culture and whatever it was about its politics or culture that, at that moment, made it different. I don't remember much of the next few days except a visit later to a neighborhood where much of the killing and destruction had taken place. But we know that nearly 3,000 Sikhs were brutally murdered by armed gangs in the next few days while the police stood by and the administration looked on. The independent, postcolonial state was devouring its own nationals.

I mention all this not because "communal riots" were unheard of in India. I had grown up around a social science and popular discourse of communalism and frequent communal riots in the country. But my dominant understanding of that was as a lack in the body politic, a disease of "traditional" Hindus and Muslims that saw them killing each other periodically over various provocations. Hyderabad, the city I grew up in, was no stranger to this logic, having witnessed a number of brutal riots. But many of these riots I had seen only on paper, i.e. read about them. In almost all the reporting, though, it was never really clear who was being killed or why (since the newspapers followed a convention of not naming individuals or groups); what was apparent, and probably was meant to be apparent, was social disorder. And, in almost all cases, the state stepped in, sooner or later with various measures: army marches, president's rule, "the healing touch," and so on. In other words, these riots appeared as a failure of the social or political fabric that a good state, many a time incompetent and slow, but benevolent nevertheless, periodically stepped in to repair. And what followed then were discourses on communal harmony and secularism or treatises on the socio-economic or political causes of communal riots and how to overcome them as progressive citizens. Society was the problem and the state stepped in to rectify the situation. Our social pathologies, our incomplete modernity, it seemed, required the postcolonial state to teach its nationals how to get along with each other, how to sing together, our vaunted unity in diversity.

But New Delhi 1984 consumed me in a different way. It was in the capital city. New Delhi. Not on the periphery of a vast sub-continent, outside of the immediate reach of state forces. And the state was deliberately quiet, willing the killings to go on. Worse, the next Prime Minister, the son of the slain one, seemed to justify the killings by claiming that "when a big tree falls, the earth shakes." On one side were the images of the new Prime Minister, in spotless white, standing holding his

young son by the funeral pyre of his mother, eyes shaded by dark glasses. On the other side were pictures of grieving Sikhs, mostly women, holding the remains of their loved ones who had been beaten, butchered and burnt to death. This was not the face of an incompetent state, one that takes a while to get its act together but comes around eventually. This was a deathly state that was coldly competent and calculatingly indifferent to the deaths of its own that it had started willing. This was a state bloated with the knowledge, the organizational ability and the political will to kill. This was the postcolonial state tearing its own. How does one, raised on the vices of colonialism and the virtues of freedom, nationalism and independence, relate to that?

Failing to forge

Writing in the *New Yorker* about "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi," Amitav Ghosh, who was also in New Delhi in October–November 1984, discusses his dilemma about how to even talk about these occurrences. Drawing on the work of the Bosnian writer, Dzevad Karahasan, Ghosh wonders about the dangers of focusing the narration on what leaps out at a writer here, which is the violence. The vividness of this violence as what is worthy of narrating appears to be an outcome of what Karahasan sees as the "dominant aesthetic of our time," an "aesthetic of indifference." Within this aesthetic, all of us have, Ghosh argues following Karahasan, come to expect the "bloody detail" or the "elegantly staged conflagration" that "closes a chapter or effects a climax" as a spectacle for the reader. While this fits our "modern conventions of representation," Ghosh says that this also poses a dilemma for the writer who sees herself as a citizen.

Resisting his writer-self and the sense of writer's wonder that would otherwise have drawn him to the violence, Ghosh draws on the identity of the citizen and asks what must be done when the "Constitutional authority" "breaks down" and the burden of the writer is not as relevant as the burden of the citizen. This is the time, he answers, when he wants to "join crowds" even though Ghosh like V.S. Naipaul in whose words he finds a resonance, believes that "writers," typically, "don't join crowds." The act of joining a crowd, for Ghosh here, implies becoming a part of those significant numbers of people who, in the face of horrifying violence, respond by resisting it through ordinary acts of risk and courage. These ordinary acts are not very dramatic and so do not invite the gaze of those drawn to write about such events, but they are crucial. They are crucial because, in the face of grotesque and brutal violence, they are an "affirmation of humanity."

Ghosh, the citizen, responds to the dangers of a dominant aesthetic of indifference, an aesthetic that leads writers to portray the "bloody details" of violence while ignoring the un-dramatic ordinary acts, by asking us to turn our gaze to the latter and telling us to look for that in every portrayal from other parts of the world that only emphasizes the violent. As he phrases it, "When I now read descriptions of troubled parts of the world, in which violence appears primordial and inevitable, a fate to which masses of people are largely resigned, I find myself asking: Is that all there was to it? Or is it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form—or a style or a voice of a plot—that could accommodate both violence and the civilized, willed response to it?"

I read Ghosh's account as offering a challenge to all of us, in International Relations, who seek to describe, understand or explain violent events. I see it as pushing us to ask: "Have we failed to find a form—or a style or a voice of a plot—that could accommodate both violence and the civilized, willed response to it?" I take this seriously and I admire the ways in which Ghosh's writings deliver on this front. I am reminded particularly of that passage in *In an Antique Land* where he writes that it is important, in the context of a communal riot, of Hindu–Muslim violence, to remember that even as this was going on, Muslims saved Hindus and Hindus saved Muslims. It is important because it is through those remembrances that we remain sane ("it is the incantation that redeems our sanity"):

> I was to recognize those stories [of the riot in East Pakistan in January 1964] years later, when reading through a collection of old newspapers, I discovered that on the very night I'd seen those flames dancing around the walls of our house, there had been a riot in Calcutta too, similar in every respect except that there it was Muslims who had been attacked by Hindus. But equally, in both cities—and this must be said, it must always be said, for *it is the incantation that redeems our sanity*—in both Dhaka and Calcutta, there were exactly mirrored stories of Hindus and Muslims coming to each others' rescue, so that many more people were saved than killed.
>
> The stories of those riots are always the same: tales that grow out of an explosive barrier of symbols—of cities going up in flames because of a cow found dead in a temple or a pig in a mosque; of people killed for wearing a lungi or a dhoti, depending on where they find themselves; of women disemboweled for wearing veils or vermilion, of men dismembered for the state of their foreskins. … I could not have expected them to understand an Indian's terror of symbols.[12]

An Indian's terror of symbols: to understand what it means, in a suddenly transformed public space, to be reduced to a fragment, to be read off a foreskin or a dot on the face or a knot in your hair. But the question that Ghosh doesn't seem to answer and that I cannot let go of is the issue of the colonial state, that "Constitutional authority," that has "broken down." The year 1984 made it clear, if it was not fully clear before, that now the terror was emanating from the state. And Hindus and Sikhs could save each other, but how effective was that in the face of a state that not only appropriated the symbols of the postcolonial nation but armed itself with all the paraphernalia—voter registration lists, house addresses, ration cards—that allowed it to tag and track insufficiently nationalized bodies, in order to hunt and kill? As theorists of the political and the postcolonial, how do we think, how do we come to terms, with that state? What responsibility—what burden, obligation, duty, what scholarship—falls on us as we try to make sense of that willful transmogrification? What failure of form, what failure of the postcolonial, lies here?

The pogrom in 1984 fractured the narrative of the incompetent but well-intentioned Indian State that I had inherited. This was not the postcoloniality I had signed onto. The massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in November 1984 remained embedded in my bodily memory, pulsing but not addressed categorically, until Gujarat, 2002.

Gujarat 2002. February, March, April.

I was in Poughkeepsie as I followed the events in Gujarat, India, 27 February. The burning of 58 men, women and children coming back in a train at Godhra in Gujarat; the pogrom against Muslims that was unleashed by the local government after that; the silence and complicity of the central government as the violence continued day after day; the horror stories that were flooding the newspapers every day; the citizens' report that I could barely read then, in Rockefeller Hall 411, for so horrifying were the details, so blood-curdling the stories of what was happening, once again:

> The next seventy-two hours were to demonstrate exactly what the ruling BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] in Gujarat—and at the Centre—had in mind. A pogrom of unimaginable proportions was unleashed with the full sanction of the government. Goons from the RSS [Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh], BJP, VHP [Vishwa Hindu Parishad] and Bajrang Dal were given a free hand by the state authorities and police. Voters' lists, arms, gas cylinders and transportation

> mysteriously became available. Despite Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee cancelling his trip to Australia for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in anticipation of a major outbreak of violence, he did nothing to ensure law and order was maintained. The state government delayed asking for the deployment of the Army till the evening of 28 February. Even though the troops began arriving in Ahmedabad early on 1 March, lack of logistical cooperation from the local authorities meant they could not be effectively deployed until 3 March, by which time the worst damage had already been done. By then, over 600 Muslims had been killed (the unofficial death toll today is more than 2,000), more than 200,000 had been displaced because their homes had been looted and burnt, and Muslim property worth several thousand crores of rupees destroyed, all under the watchful eye of the police and state administration.[13]

Yes—this was not the only plot or the only story line. Yes, there were many "civilized and willed responses" to this violence that affirmed your faith in the humanity of ordinary people. Siddharth Varadarajan's tribute to Geetaben[14] is one among many of those small acknowledgements of that humanity. But even as the stories of courageous and personally fatal acts by ordinary people rescue my faith in the human, in the revulsion that most ordinary people feel towards brutal acts of violence, I am still left with the hyper-competence of the postcolonial state, its organized treasury of citizens' identification marks, and its politics of killing to deal with. How do I make sense of its cannibalistic rituals?

I start leafing through the books on this pogrom and repugnance swamps me. I know I will not be able to read them fully (and I tell myself, maybe a little too forgivingly: what purpose would that serve?). But the "bloody details" become important, for there is a disproportionality there that defies ordinary affirmations of humanity.

In the very beginning of one account, there is a report that the Chief Minister of Gujarat at that time (and, three elections later, even *now*, in 2014), Narendra Modi, called in his administration officials after the incident at Godhra to tell them to "let justice be done for Godhra and to remain inactive during communal disturbances."[15] On state-run television, Mr. Modi is also reported to have said: "I want to assure the people that Gujarat shall not tolerate any such incident. The culprits will get *full punishment for their sins*. Not only this, *we will set an example* that nobody, *not even in his dreams*, thinks of committing a heinous crime like this."[16] Moreover, later on in the day, in the Gujarat Assembly, Mr. Modi re-articulated this sentiment: "The State Government,

taking seriously this cruel and inhuman offence of the mass violence (on innocent travelers), is firm to take symbolic strict steps and *to punish in such a way* that such an incident may not repeat in the future."[17] The then Home Minister of Gujarat, Gordhan Zadaphia, said, "We will *teach a lesson* to those who have done this."[18]

There are those telltale signs, blood-portending, gut spilling, encounter to happen, details: punishment in such a way that it won't happen again, making examples, teaching a lesson, justice. Let justice be done. Let justice be done in such a style that unjust and heinous crimes will never be committed again. What is the relationship between teaching lessons, dealing in death and justice being done? What is the politics of killing citizens, citizen death, here? Is it how to effectively teach one section of its citizenry such that the others learn their lessons properly? Ghosh asks: "Have we failed to find a form—or a style or a voice of a plot—that could accommodate both violence and the civilized, willed response to it?" Could we redirect that question at our understandings of the Indian postcolonial state and ask: Have we, decades after independence, failed to "find a form—or a style or a voice of a plot," that allows a more humane and accommodating relation between the state, its citizenry and very basic ideas of justice? Or, have we lost the plot, the postcolonial storyline, altogether? Is it only a sanitizing, soul-deafening, insane incantation now?

Regional chants

In Andhra Pradesh today, particularly in its coastal districts, Sir Arthur Cotton is venerated as a visionary engineer and humanitarian who "sacrificed his life" to rescue Telugu people from the scourge of famine:[19]

> Known as "Apara Bhageeratha", he had sacrificed his life for providing irrigation water to thousands of farmers in the two districts, which are now called the rice bowl of Andhra Pradesh.

Since Bhageeratha was the king credited with bringing the river Ganga to earth from the heavens, this is no small praise. There are, reportedly, around 3,000 statues of Sir Arthur in just two coastal districts—East and West Godavari—of the state. But the number of statues might not be an adequate indicator of the "love and adoration" that his name seems to evoke in these parts.[20] Known sometimes as Cotton *dora*, Sir Arthur Cotton's birthday is regularly celebrated here; his descendants are invited and felicitated by Union Ministers hailing from Andhra Pradesh;[21] there is a museum devoted to his work and his biography has been translated into Telugu.[22]

> Love and adoration of the people in the twin Godavari districts for Sir Arthur Cotton, the architect of the Godavari delta system, literally knew no bounds on his 208th birth anniversary on Sunday. Overwhelmed by a deep sense of gratitude for his invaluable contribution to the irrigation system in the region, people from different walks of life joined the celebrations as a thanks-giving gesture.
>
> (Nagaraja 2011)

How did the grateful citizens of this region celebrate and give thanks to Sir Arthur Cotton?

> "Abhishekams" with milk were performed to his statues in some parts. A farmers' club named after him held a function to celebrate the event at Pentapadu in West Godavari district. The club members adorned his bronze statue with a garland made of paddy panicles and five persons, including a progressive farmer and a retired irrigation engineer, were honoured on the occasion.
>
> (Nagaraja 2011)

The combination of "abhishekams"[23] and the honoring of "progressive farmers" and "irrigation engineers" is a curious hybridity. A complex story of the laying of an imperial infrastructure, of developing the productive capacity of empire and extracting revenues for the British Treasury from that, a story in which brutal repression in one part of India—the suppression of the 1857 rebellion—was integrally connected to the stability and sustenance of empire elsewhere, has now become a chant, a jingle, about an exceptional and self-sacrificing human: one who ostensibly used his "engineering prowess" to save millions of Telugu people from death by starvation and "endeared" himself to them forever.

What is striking at first glance about these hymns to the great savior is the seeming generosity, the graceful reaching out of humane concern across the borders of time (a century and half), territory (British empire to Andhra Pradesh) and culture (English and Telugu): great-grandfather struggles to build a barrage in order to save millions of lives far away from home; the descendants of those saved never forget him and, a century and a half later, still reach out, once again, to the descendants of the great savior to honor and celebrate their common life-giver, their common father. What is affirmed in the process is the humanity, the humanism, of both the British and the Telugus. Can this be the incantation that "redeems our sanity," the ordinary act of humanity that takes us beyond the standard plot line of the colonial encounter? Or have the great saviors already scripted the future peals of the Natives?

There are a number of ways of reading this transformation.[24] I will limit myself to raising two issues that are not necessarily new—in terms of the workings of colonial discourses—but are worth reiterating in this regard.

First, what is crucial to the story line is the necessary amnesia about the violence integral to the founding and maintenance of the colonial order—whether it is the exemplary execution parades in other parts of the empire or the displacement induced by the very processes of development. And it is in order to induce this amnesia about the systemic violence of a colonial empire, an empire premised on accumulating "strength, wealth and credit," in routinely doing its "duty" to benighted others, that the story line elevates the heroic and "exceptional" qualities of the empire builders—their moral or technical or governing abilities—so that we get stories of brave and heroic individuals rescuing helpless Natives by fighting against fierce opponents (ranging from famines to fundamentalism depending on your time lines and spatial limits).[25] The punishing lessons routinely handed down by colonial administrators are thus forgotten, ignored or seen as exceptional to the functioning of empire. This is understandable as a self-image and dominant ideology of colonial officials. But how do Indians and Telugus who see themselves as "progressive" come to reproduce the same cant?

Second, this story of imperial humanitarianism was put in place at the same time as the irrigation systems were being laid and the mutineers were being blown away for daring to imagine otherwise. That is, this is a "modular gratitude" whose form was handed down to the Natives as an integral part of the developmental infrastructure of empire. The tintinnabulations to come were already written down for the benighted Natives. In this regard, in a Minute by the Government of Madras, the Governor, Sir Charles Trevelyan, notes[26]:

> If we have done our duty at least to this part of India, and have founded a system which will be a source of *strength and wealth and credit to us* as a nation, it is due to
>
> ONE MASTER MIND,
>
> which, with admirable industry and perseverance, in spite of every discouragement, has worked out this great result. Other able and devoted officers have caught Colonel Cotton's spirit and have rendered invaluable aid under his advice and direction, but for this first creation of genius, we are indebted to him alone.

If an "empire maker" and "empire lover" helps "found" a "system" that provides "strength and wealth and credit" to Britain, if his "industry

and perseverance," his "spirit" and "genius," enthuse British colonial officers to deliver well on what they see as their "duty" to "this part of India," an India and Indians ("bookless Asiatics") who are "immersed in ignorance and poverty," if this is a "debt" that one British national owes another in the service of empire, how do these debts get taken on by Telugus? How and why do "progressive" Telugus, especially those who come a century and a half later, after Indian independence, assume these moral debts (that are also, at the same time, a sign of their deficits), debts that are premised on their very Telugu worthlessness? What is this strange burden that they are assuming and why? Should it matter that this burden of gratitude is already being prescribed and scripted for the Natives to come by the makers and lovers of empire even as they are laying its foundations (the Governor predicts that: "Colonel Cotton's name will be venerated by millions yet unborn")? What has been forged in this colonial encounter is an unredeemable form of "developmental gratitude," a bonded labor of perennial love that postcolonial politics has not done enough to disrupt.

Not surprisingly, one can hear the strains of this colonial concert in other parts of the Indian postcolony.

In Gujarat, since 2002, Narendra Modi and his political party have been, as mentioned briefly earlier on, re-elected to power three times. He is not only the current Chief Minister of Gujarat but is seen and projected as a strong contender for the post of Prime Minister after the national elections of 2014. Indian and international industrialists who shunned him after the pogrom of 2002 now flock to Gujarat because, under Mr. Modi's guidance, this region is also presented as a model of rapid economic growth, an example for the rest of India.[27] Mr. Modi is now "Vikas Purush" ("Development Man")[28] raising a new and enchanting GIFT city in Gujarat.

But what now, in India today, of those dismembered, buried and cremated in 1857 and 2002; or, from 1857 to 2002? Who hears their voices under these fabulous foundations? Who remembers them? And how?

Notes

1 Fanon, Frantz (translated by Richard Philcox). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove, 2004.
2 Gowing, Timothy. *A Soldier's Experience: Or, A Voice from the Ranks*. Nottingham: T. Forman, 1892.
3 See Jacoby, Jeff. "Finally, Justice is Done," *Boston Globe*, May 2, 2011, www.jeffjacoby.com/9515/finally-justice-is-done (accessed May 25, 2011).
4 See, "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University." *The White House*, May 23, 2013. www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university.

5 Cotton, Sydney. *Nine Years on the North-west Frontier of India: From 1854–1863*. R. Bentley, London: 1868.

6 To illustrate that there is a plurality to the issue of death and how we can think of it even in the middle of war, one can usefully remember the Pandavas approaching Bheeshma in the *Mahabharata* and asking him how they can defeat him (kill him) and his answer explaining how:

> After a moment, the Pandava [Yudhishtira] says, 'I have a thought. On the first day of the war, when I went to Pitama [Bheeshma] for his blessing, he said to me that he was fighting only because he was obliged to. He said his heart lay with us; somehow, even after these nine days, I still believe him. I know of only one way in which we can kill Bheeshma. I will go to him tonight, and ask him how he can be killed.' He turns to Krishna, 'If you think it is the right thing to do, I will go now.' The others seem a little bewildered by the extraordinary idea. But Krishna says at once, 'Bheeshma loves you and, if you ask him earnestly, how will he not answer you? *Who better than the one you hunt to tell you how he can be hunted*?'

From Ramesh Menon, *The Mahabharata: A Modern Rendering*, Volume II, Rupa and Co. New Delhi, 2004, p. 245, emphasis added.

7 Cotton, Sydney. *Nine Years on the North-west Frontier of India: From 1854–1863*. London: R. Bentley, 1868.

8 Ibid.

9 Lady Hope (1900: 8-9) draws our attention to the record left by Sir Arthur Cotton of Sydney Cotton: "Sir Sydney Cotton was a very able officer. He commanded at Peshawur during the Mutiny, and had, as prisoners, five thousand of the mutineers, whom he disarmed. Among his other services was the raising of the 21st Lancers. When he had been some months in command at Peshawur, a friend of mine sent one of the senior officers of the Adjutant-General's Office at Calcutta and asked: 'How is Sydney Cotton getting along in Peshawur?' The reply was:

> 'This is the way he is getting on. Before he went there we never had an hour's freedom from anxiety, night or day, about the place. Since he went there we have never had one hour's anxiety.' Happily he had to work with two of the finest men in India at that time: Sir Herbert Edwardes, the Commissioner, and General Lushington. Peshawur was at that time the station on which more depended than upon any other. It was one of the principal providential facts in the Mutiny that the defence was in the hands of three such officers as those I have named.

10 Why are the people so poor at present? Because, being entirely without any means, excepting bullocks, which can be substituted for human labour, it is as much as they can do to feed, clothe and shelter themselves; or rather I should say, *more* than they can do, at least while they have to keep their rulers in luxury. This is the plain and indisputable answer to the question. On the other hand, why is England rich? That is, why has it the means of supplying itself with a thousand things beyond the mere necessaries of life? Because, while it contains only 25

> millions of people, there is as much done by the aid of Steam, Water, Roads, Canals, Railroads, Ports, Docks, &c., as could be effected by the labour of perhaps 200 millions of people; and having therefore the work of that number, while the necessaries of life are required for only one-eighth, there is of course an enormous surplus of wealth exchangeable for other things. And this is not peculiar to one country; for if besides the labour of 140 millions in India, we had the work of another 500 millions performed by means of Roads, Canals, Railways, Water, Steam, &c., there would be in India also abundance of labour available for other things beyond the necessaries of life, and consequently abundance of wealth.

Cotton, Arthur. *Public Works in India*. London: Richardson Brothers, 1854, pp. 51–54.

11 Deakin, Alfred. *Irrigated India*. London: W. Thacker and Co., 1893.

12 Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. New York: Vintage, 1994, pp. 209–10.

13 Varadarajan, Siddharth. "Chronicle of a Tragedy Foretold," in Siddharth Varadarajan (ed.) *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002, pp. 8–9.

14 Varadarajan, Siddharth. "I Salute You, Geetaben," in Siddharth Varadarajan (ed.) *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002.

15 Professor Richard Bonney, Dedication for the Indian Edition of "Harvest of Hatred," in *Harvest of Hatred: The Concerned Citizens Tribunal Report on Gujarat, 2002*. New Delhi: Media House, 2004, p.5.

16 Broadcast (in Gujarati) on Ahmedabad Doordarshan, February 28, 2002. Reproduced as Annexure 4AA in Editors Guild Report. Quoted in Varadarajan, Siddharth. "Chronicle of a Tragedy Foretold," in Siddharth Varadarajan (ed.) *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002, p. 8, emphasis added.

17 Press Note of Gujarat government's Directorate of Information dated February 28, 2002. Reproduced in Editors Guild Report, p. 43. Quoted in Varadarajan, Siddharth "Chronicle of a Tragedy Foretold," in Siddharth Varadarajan (ed.) *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002, p. 8, emphasis added.

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23 "Abhisheka," *Wikipedia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abhisheka.
24 See, for example, Maringanti, Anant. *Telangana Matters*. http://telanganamatters.org.
25 Bose, Purnima. *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
26 Hope, (Lady) Elizabeth. *General Sir Arthur Cotton—His Life and Work*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900, p. 2, emphasis added.
27 Prominent economists such as Jagdish Bhagwati and Amartya Sen write of the "Gujarat model" and the "Kerala model" of growth and social spending (Gupta and Guha, 2014). While Professor Bhagwati dissociates his support of the Gujarat model from explicit support for Mr. Modi, Professor Amartya Sen is more forthcoming in his support for a different economic model and also his criticism of Modi for not doing enough to make minorities feel secure in Gujarat.
28 On "Vikas Purush," see: "Modi 'Vikas Purush,' Says Gadkari," *NDTV.com*, January 31, 2011. www.ndtv.com/article/india/modi-vikas-purush-says-gadkari-15613; Verma, Lalmani. "In UP, Amit Shah Sells 'Vikas Purush' Modi to Party Workers," *The Indian Express*, June 13, 2013. www.indianexpress.com/news/in-up-amit-shah-sells-vikas-purush-modi-to-party-workers, "Narendra Modi," *YouTube*. www.youtube.com/user/narendramodi?feature=watch.

3 Sentimental economies

One of the more distinctive memories of my childhood in Hyderabad is of the construction of the Ramakrishna Movie Theatre Complex, very near our school in the crowded lanes of Abids, the city center. Abids, named after a Jewish valet of the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad,[1] was a bustling market, always crowded, with a dark grey statue of Jawaharlal Nehru with a dove flying out of his hand placed grandly in front of the General Post Office (GPO). In between the GPO and Nehru's statue was a long row of booksellers or seller (the boundaries of ownership were not very clear since you just browsed from one end to the other) selling Sidney Sheldon, Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour, Sudden, and other Western fictions; probably their pirated editions, though that was not a meaningful term then.

From under Nehru, roads shot out in multiple directions to embrace the city. One arterial snaked around a whole bevy of schools (Methodist, St. George's Grammar School, Little Flower, All Saints, Rosary Convent, Aliya High School (also known as Madrassa-e-Aliya)), the State Bank of Hyderabad, Fateh Maidan Stadium, Nizam College, Gandhi Medical College, an ice-cream shop called Havmor, Liberty Talkies (known then for showing only English movies), till it eventually touched Tank Bund (a place you could easily walk to or go in a green double-decker numbered 42, or was it 7?). If you faced Nehru, looking up at him, on the left, one side of this road wound down towards Troop Bazaar, Sultan Bazaar and the historical Residency of the British, now turned into a Women's College, placed right next to the Osmania Medical College, behind which lay the areas of the Old City, Chaderghat, Malakpet and so on. If you faced Nehru and went down the right side, you went to Moazzam Jahi Market, Exhibition Grounds, Gandhi Bhavan, Charminar, and ended up in the Old City again.

Left or right of Nehru, whichever way you went, well before the economic liberalization of 1991, every visible front on these roads was

dotted with shops: shops selling watches, shops hawking clothes colorfully hung, shops displaying shoes, and shops interspersed occasionally with entryways for movie theatres, theatres with names like Zamarrud, Palace, Light House, Sagar Talkies. The truly unruly boys in our school, rumor had it, regularly skipped class for the "first day first shows" in these theatres. For the rest of us, school and movie times and market spaces were specially segregated zones governed by different rules of entry and exit.

Just behind Nehru and the GPO, from the side of an Iranian chai shop, ran a narrow lane, a *galli*, through which you walked to reach a house with a big green gate and an inviting open space. I have many fond memories of walking through that lane, gently opening the gate, climbing up a set of stairs, walking into a sunlit, green pillared welcoming living room and asking, as softly as I could manage: "Aunty, is Pahai there?" Kuo Pahai was my classmate, friend, badminton doubles partner, and much more. But more than anything else, Pahai's grades in Telugu (my mother tongue, not his) were generally higher than mine in school, as was his flair for various other languages, including French. Even though we were all fairly competitive in trying to do well in school (intensely focused on getting a good grade and never imagining failing in any class), there was, in retrospect, much mildness to the competition. Pahai also enjoyed sketching and coloring, and that was another common and competitive bond.

Immediately to the right of Pahai's house were two new movie theatres, ensconced in a zone demarcated as an "estate." While the term estate was a little odd, emerging as this zone did from the middle of crowded bazaars, motor mechanic, steel utensil and cycle repair shops, and *gallis* crowded with the constant movements of people, it was not altogether strange since a famous Telugu movie actor called NTR (Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao) also lived close by. The fact that his house had slightly higher walls, and though it stood on the other side of Pahai's house you couldn't really peer into it, was probably what justified the estate aspect: you read it as some cover for the actor's need for opacity, given his regional fame. But he was right there, right next to Pahai, and his sons and daughters went to the same schools nearby, probably because those schools were also right there, right close by. And so did a variety of other children from various non-estate backgrounds, from these streets and shops, as also from the streets of the Old City and other neighborhoods much further away such as Malakpet, Dilsukhnagar, Charminar and so on.

Into these surroundings around Abids, early in the morning every weekday, many city buses, cycles, rickshaws, scooters, motorcycles,

some autos and a few cars all streamed in to let out hundreds of chatting, screaming, uniformed, back-pack- and satchel- and steel box-laden school kids: hundreds of them every day. Rush hour was an entanglement of multiple times and places in this zone: school time (8.30am/9am–3pm/4pm with a lunch recess at 12.30pm–1pm), market time (7am to 9pm) and cinema time (11am morning show, 2.30pm matinee, 6pm first show and 9pm second show). Rush hour was a complexly tangled space-place of crowded bodies and vehicles of different shapes and sizes negotiating shops, movies, schools, snacks, hawkers, books and magazines on the streets.

In the midst of these entanglements, these crowds and crowded spaces, what was really intriguing about the Ramakrishna theatres was their relatively more capacious lay-out even within that market-cum-school-cum-movie-theatre-cum-shop space. Neither the GPO nor the Police Station right across, both state institutions, had the same luxury. Part of what made that spaciousness possible was that the tall grille gates that marked the boundaries of NTR's estate managed to keep out the flow of bodies, traffic, pavement dwellers, hawkers and assorted sellers and let in only those who wanted to see the movies. Unlike the other movie theatres where you bought the tickets from booths facing the street, here you had to go through gates guarded by men in khaki uniforms. The grille work on the gates allowed you to see inside while the guards prevented various undesirables from straying in. So cars, pedestrians, cyclists, maybe not rickshaws, could all go into this estate as long as the people in them were going to watch the movies. The relatively planned regulation of space within this estate (separate parking for bicycles, motor cycles, cars, well-demarcated booths for tickets, places set aside for small lawns with fountains) and well-designed interiors inside the movie hall with aquariums and curving staircases: all of these were part of the novel and attractive aspects of going to see movies in these two theatres. It was a space meant to enchant. You went to see a specific film but the spectacle started well before the movie itself. One was led, step by step, into a well organized and colorfully lighted world that ended only when, after the movie ended, you retraced your steps from those dramatic lights and theatrical spaces back into the streets. It was a full-blown, full-body experience that was guaranteed irrespective of whether the film turned out to be a hit or a flop. The film was a significant, but not the only, aspect of this entertainment complex.

Part of what also made this complex different from the rest was that, inside the theatre, in large alcoves on both sides were portraits of the movie actor, NTR himself, in his various screen roles. But these statuesque portraits were not those of a farmer or middle-class hero or any of

the other characters he had played in hundreds of films but primarily of certain *avatars* from Hindu epics (Krishna, Rama, Karna, Duryodhana and so on). So when you were inside the cinema hall, and waiting for the movie to begin, in between commercials for Four Square Kings cigarettes or Liril luxury soap or more pedantic Government of India Films Division news broadcasts, you couldn't but notice NTR-as-Krishna, NTR-as-Rama, NTR-as-Karna towering over you, looking somewhere beyond your horizon, almost as if he were gazing benignly at the futures awaiting you.

Part sacred, part cinematic, part absurd, you took this all in your stride as part of an entertainment complex. You were going to the movies, after all. It was like those "dialogues" that NTR was known for in his films: dramatically delivered, long oratorical flourishes that swept you away from the prosaic course of day-to-day speech but were not sustainable as a permanent form of communication, however much you may have tried. You enjoyed it as long as it lasted and admired the rhetorical skills and entertaining abilities of those who were practiced in the art of delivering these, but you did not expect the cinematic flourishes to replace your everyday discourses, nor your friends to be in entertaining mode all the time. There was a time and a place for those forms.

Statues had their place too. Gandhi and Nehru statues dot almost every *chowrastha*-traffic circle in Hyderabad as in almost all other Indian cities and towns. These were the only statues that I remember being intimately familiar with. Actually, I stand corrected; there was at least one more. Inside our school in Abids was a large assembly space, towering above which was another alcove, with a sizeable figure of Jesus inside it, arms outstretched, as if welcoming us, every day, to our morning classes and also watching benignly over us at recess as we played rough *kabaddi* or tugged at each other's ties or tumbled over, depending on the state of our play. Nehru, Jesus and NTR (as various Hindu avatars) thus hovered over our heads in Abids. And, of course, this statuary promiscuity—nationalist, religious, secular, cinematic spirits cohabiting together—that we were street and school heirs to was officially symbolized by the premier museum, the Salarjung Museum in Afzalgunj, across the Musi river, near the High Court and the Osmania General Hospital: a Museum that was a proudly idiosyncratic collection of objects and figures from all over the world, where you could move from the veiled Rebecca to the cuckoo clock as easily as from exquisitely calligraphed manuscripts to medieval weapons. When it came to Hyderabad's history and culture, discrimination and taste lay in how well and in what manner you mixed the statues, spirits, colors, sounds and languages and not in the fact that you mixed them or found some impossible way to proclaim fidelity to only one of these. Sacred, cinematic,

secular: you took this surrealism in your stride as you walked these enchanting, entangled and hybrid spaces and times.

The spirit of Telugus past

And then, in the matter of a few weeks, early 1980s, NTR, the movie actor decided to enter electoral politics. He stepped out of the screen and into a van-cum-chariot, whose wings were propelled by the print-finance-commodity capitalism of a chit-fund-pickle-media serial accumulator, unfurled the auspicious turmeric/*pasupu* flag of Telugu pride and, dialogically positioning himself as the spokesperson of a Telugu *desam*, a Telugu nation, battling against an insensitive Center in New Delhi, quickly came to political power.[2] Though our re-signification as Telugu subjects primarily (a dispossession from our earlier promiscuous selves) was a little sudden—Telugu, the language, was what I spoke at home, but it was neither my first nor my second, but my third language in school—it was not without pride, given the general illiteracy about the South in New Delhi and North India (where many frequently relied on the cartography of a Madras Presidency from colonial times to designate those from the South of the country). Now, suddenly, everyone in Delhi knew about Telugus and knew them well enough to know that they were not the same as Tamils or, even worse, "Madrasis." You couldn't but thank NTR for the North's increased literacy.

But just as NTR stepped out of the screen and onto the political field, the principles of his estate planning, re-nominations and dispossessions also took over Hyderabad city. Teluguness materialized as the dominant sign everywhere. Though the Maoists in Telangana had long wanted to surround the city from the countryside, it was the Telugu-lovers who were more successful in this battle, suffusing the local landscape with Telugu gates, Telugu names, Telugu dialogues, a Telugu University, Telugu urinals; part cinematic, fully absurd, it was suddenly pouring Telugu everywhere. One of the more notable of these materializations was in the form of the statues of eminent Telugus on Tank Bund Road, 33 in all, that NTR installed as part of a general drive to venerate Telugu figures. Parts of the city surely looked cleaner now—greener, better ordered—but they all also looked or were made to look very, very Telugu. People noted wryly that many of the 33 statues were, like the figures in his theatres, various *avatars* of NTR himself. Among the 33 statues of eminent Telugus on Tank Bund installed by NTR was one of Sir Arthur Cotton, now re-designated as an honorary Telugu. There are no statues on Tank Bund to the Indians blown apart by Sydney Cotton in India's First War of Independence or to many heroic figures from Telangana, perhaps

because they were not Telugu enough. Telugufication came to mean a memorialization of the canals but amnesia about the cannons.

The serial accumulator behind NTR's rise, transformed through his own newsprint into a media "baron," went a step ahead and built a sprawling new estate, on the outskirts of Hyderabad, and designated it Film City.[3] For a little while, it looked like Telugu cinematic culture—and its billboard heroes, heroines, producers, directors, song- and script-writers, vamps and villains—had taken over Hyderabad city and the media and politics of Andhra Pradesh. Producing Teluguness as political reality, marginalizing earlier hybridities and cosmopolitanisms, NTR's estate and entertainment complex engulfed us all.

But, long as they are, and though made even longer sometimes with an extra song and dance added at the very last minute before their release, even Telugu and Hindi movies eventually come to an end, and so did this one; though it ended, not with an obligatory family picture but a more dramatic twist. NTR was out-maneuvered politically by his till then trusted son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu. Less dramatic a figure than his father-in-law and without his regional, cinematic fan-base, Naidu was a quieter strategist who, after slowly but surely outwitting and consigning his father-in-law to political irrelevance, decided to make Hyderabad city and Andhra Pradesh the protagonists of a more ambitious global screen play.

Asserting that ideology was dead and that the only "ism" that mattered was tourism, Naidu went about strenuously re-configuring Hyderabad into a desirable destination for global and national capital. He did not throw the Telugufication aside but did what was needed, in terms of economic rationalization and administrative arrangements, to make Hyderabad attractive to business, rivaling and sometimes even surpassing the allures of Bangalore, the favorite city till then. More than anything else, Naidu built, promoted and sold the idea of brand Hyderabad through its transformation into a new Hi-Tech city called Cyberabad.[4] From being a hybrid, cosmopolitan and culturally promiscuous place, Hyderabad re-materialized, in a matter of a decade or so, as a newly seductive site for capital in various forms.

Managing reason

Mapping the vision motivating these transformations, Chandrababu Naidu observed (2000: 9) "The major challenge for all of us in India for some time to come, will be economic." Claiming that an "old-style politics," reliant on "free handouts," was no longer "affordable," Naidu (2000: 10) argued for a new politics, one in which politicians took the

"hard decisions" that mobilized revenues, prevented their states from going bankrupt and promoted "effective governance." Government had a new role here (Naidu 2000: 12): "At the heart of the administrative reform we are attempting," Naidu noted, "is the change in the role of government from being actor, to enabler and facilitator. The government must stop trying to do things which it does badly and install a policy framework which gives it the role of a facilitator."

There were a number of fascinating aspects to Naidu's idea of the economic and the challenges it was said to pose for governance, but a contrast that he himself set up about his inspiration will clarify his ideals best:

> Who should be the inspiration for a 21st-century Indian politician? In any century, Mahatma Gandhi's precepts and his dreams of an equitable Indian society will remain universally relevant. For my partymen and women, N.T. Rama Rao's instinctive vision also remains very relevant, based as it was on an articulation of regional aspirations and a clear empathy with the backward and downtrodden. But beyond that, because providing a range of services for millions of people across different income groups is such a complex job, politicians must read management thought, must be acquainted with the managerial wisdom of Peter Drucker and Jack Welch, the legendary CEO of General Electric, and must study how politicians in other parts of the world have succeeded in delivering growth and governance.
>
> (2000: 20–21)

In the rapid movement from Mahatma Gandhi to "Neutron Jack" via NTR, what was notable was the steady trimming of the scope of politics: from the timeless ("in any century") and dreamlike universality of "Gandhi's precepts" of equity to NTR's "empathy" to what was needed and doable in the present: the "complex job" of "providing a range of services for millions of people across different income groups." The diminishing of the political—from the universal to the immediate, from the equitable and empathic to the rational and the manageable—was accompanied by an expansion of the economic. Politics was rejigged as practical/managerial reason; political philosophy was muted into management thought. Both were asked to serve the demands of "the economy."

Naidu restaged politics in Andhra Pradesh, addressing the citizen as a consumer and a stakeholder who deserved professional service that they should/would be willing to pay for; the politician was now a professional manager ("At the turn of the century, training an Indian politician

in a leadership position is a management training exercise" —Naidu, 2000: 19) who served citizen-consumers and was attractive to producers, all in order to facilitate the rapid and effective growth of the economy. The place of those, Telugu and more than Telugu, who were neither consumers nor stakeholders nor producers or more than those, was left unclear in this new forging of the political field.

Mal-development

From late December 2010 through early January 2011 the new malls of Hyderabad wore a harried look. These glass boxes that normally spared no effort to flaunt their stuff, night and day, now cowered under massive nets and pretended that passers-by wouldn't notice. Telangana activists—Telugu and more than Telugu alike—had taken to the streets, and capital suddenly felt besieged.

As an undergraduate at Nizam College, in between desultory readings on underdevelopment, I remember being struck by the concept of a "glass-curtain economy."[5] I recall the concept, somewhat hazily now, as a critique of development models that accelerated growth by producing goods unaffordable for a majority of the country's population. There was something intuitively appealing about that critique, with its image of an economy as a glass box curtained off from the people: they could stand and stare, but couldn't touch what was accumulating within—a not uncommon sight in India, along all those streets dotted with shops laden with goods. Policy planners agreed that the idea of a dispossessing development—where what was produced catered to a minority with effective demand, while the majority could only gape—was a disagreeable notion. The social prestige of Indian economists and the analytical power of their models sprung from the widely shared ethical sense that generating growth was about achieving something in common, even if it was just things themselves. It was an activity oriented towards the welfare of everyone in the community. A people grew together, even if they did so very slowly.

But, in 2010, the glitzy malls and the bulky flyovers girding them—equally inaccessible to the many—concretized a different imagination of the economy. Malls were palatial and everywhere. Hyderabad even had highly specialized "wedding malls" that, especially at night, glowed yellow from afar with the hues of the jewelry inside.[6] Though such luxuries were available before, what was new was their brazen pervasiveness; now, glass curtains regulated the flows of traffic and cut into the ideas of a common people.

Many of these malls are filled with young people, clothed by the catalogue, busy buying, but also many more others, also present, dressed less categorically, mulling around, soaking in the lights and colors. These others, though not necessarily there to shop—sometimes because they know older markets with better deals, oftentimes because their desires cannot be translated into effective demand within these boxes—ride the escalators, gaze at the spectacles inside, and pose before brightly lit anorexic models nuzzling pricey cologne. But when these also-presents step onto the streets of Hyderabad as activists and protestors, they are entered into a different registry: unruly elements threatening the promised estate of a global Hyderabad as well as a shiny Incredible India. They mutate into issues of law and order, a challenge for "effective governance."

Confronted with their agitation, the mall developers and their media guards exhibit the anxiety of colonial officials facing un-catalogued Natives: unsure whether these Natives would be awed by authority or provoked by it. This tense and colonial relationship between those who flaunt and consume in these malls and those who can only gaze from within and gape from without, emerges in a number of ways in the discourse of the Telangana movement. As Professor Kodandaram, tracing the history of the movement, notes[7]:

> Telangana has … been converted into an internal colony as a result of the economic development process pursued by successive governments. Its resources have been diverted and utilized for the development of other regions. The movement for separate statehood seeks to articulate the demand for a fair share in the resources. It is an outcome of injustice meted out to the region by the successive governments in Andhra Pradesh. Separation is seen as the only answer to these grievances.

An "internal colony": a sense of colonization tears the Telugu spirit and the sedulously promoted fantasy of a common Telugu culture and identity. That this colonization was feared for a long time and was based on a sense of disparate trajectories also emerges clearly within the movement's discourse.

The late Professor Jayashankar, active in the Telangana movement for decades and one of its main intellectual architects, expressed it thus:

> The demand of the people of this region for a separate state is not a new development. It was voiced much before the formation of Andhra Pradesh and continues to be raised even thereafter. The

> reason for the resistance of people of Telangana to join [Andhra Pradesh] was fear of exploitation in the enlarged state and the reason for their reluctance to continue in the present state is the actual experience of being exploited.[8]

This fear of exploitation, according to Professor Jayashankar, pre-existed even the moment of national independence itself. Citing the experience of many people fighting against the Nizam's rule who had fled to neighboring regions, he argued that the experiences of those who had gone to places such as Nagpur and Bombay were significantly different and better than of those who had gone to places like Vijayawada in the Andhra (then Madras Presidency) region. He pointed out that the Telangana migrants to this region were generally perceived as "rich," "lazy," "culturally inferior," "uneducated," and were taken advantage of in economic transactions, notwithstanding the presumed commonality of language. Such experiences introduced a question mark around the issue of Telugu unity right from the very beginning.[9]

The possibility of colonization was also a fear recognized and acknowledged explicitly by other observers during this period. The States Reorganization Commission (also known as the Fazl Ali Commission), which examined the question of whether Telangana, as a part of the Nizam's Hyderabad State, should be merged with Andhra State (composed of Telugu-speaking areas of the erstwhile British-governed Madras presidency), had noted:

> The real fear of the people of Telangana is that if they join Andhra they will be unequally placed in relation to the people of Andhra and in this partnership the major partner will derive all the advantages immediately while Telangana itself may be converted into a colony by the enterprising Andhras.[10]

To hear these long-standing complaints of colonial exploitation is, ironically, to be taken back to the arguments that eminent Indian nationalists of an earlier era, people such as R.C. Dutt, had deployed against British rule. Dutt's argument was built on what he saw as the "reasonable expectations" generated by a relatively new form of imagining community: the nation. The imagined community being resisted in the Telangana movement, however, emerges not from the communion of nationals but that of a people within a (multi-lingual) nation, speaking only a common language, one among many in the region. Discussing nationalism as an "imagined community," Benedict Anderson notes that nationalism is marked by the "style" in which community is imagined,

by its limited nature or finite boundaries, by an idea of sovereignty and, finally, by a certain imagination of likely community as a "deep, horizontal comradeship." It is the last feature, a deep sense of fraternity, "that makes it possible," Anderson argues, "for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (1991: 6–7).

Telugu linguistic unity can also, like nationalism and other powerful communal fantasies, be read as a project of imagining a community that was horizontally solidaristic, an idea of a commons for which people were willing to die. That the story of the formation of Andhra State begins with the fasting unto death of Potti Sriramulu or that the Telangana movement has been fueled by the suicides of a number of students and activists is not accidental in this regard. Given such an imagining of a horizontally solidaristic linguistic community, what were the "reasonable expectations"—that were violated—of a people united by Telugu language?

One can condense many of the complaints and fears from Telangana as revolving around the parochial appropriation of things ostensibly held in common; that what had been integrated in the name of a common Telugu linguistic identity was historically used to promote the interests of a specific territorialized section of Telugus and not of the Telugu public in common.[11] Faced with such complaints, from inside the Telugu community, of a parochial appropriation of the commons, of discrimination and injustice, how does the dominant partner in such a community respond? What would be "reasonable expectations," in this regard, of a community that imagines itself bound by ties of horizontal solidarity?

In the reactions to the current demands of the Telangana movement, what is puzzling by its absence within the discourse of Telugu identity is any significant effort at acknowledging the moral meaningfulness of these claims of discrimination. I had assumed that, while the project of Telugu unity might have rendered only some as the winners, what would occupy a different template from this struggle over resource distribution would be the cultural and moral solidarities, the discursive claims of a shared Teluguness, of community and concern for mutual well-being that positioned the "winners" to listen attentively, to hear carefully and to at least acknowledge the grievances of their presumably very Telugu siblings.[12]

I am not, of course, arguing that one needs to agree with the grievances. What I have in mind is a simpler solidarity, ordinarily expected in a community, where one acknowledges the meaningfulness of the expressed grievances and enters the conversation with that minimal recognition of the other. But this form of solidarity is, by and large,

missing in the heated debates and discussions on Telangana. More often than not, the protests and complaints from Telangana activists and scholars are condescendingly dismissed as "emotional" and "sentimental" expressions of inept social beings.[13] That is, rather than an acknowledgement of a grievance—justified or not—what you get is the assumption of a lack in the (br)other. This refusal to take the ostensible brother seriously is a significant aspect of the coloniality of the Telugu discourse on linguistic unity. But it does not stop there. What is also apparent, within the discourse of a united Andhra Pradesh (*Samaikya Andhra*) is the barely concealed desire to appropriate, in case of an eventual separation, additional parts of the commons.

One of the ways in which this is evident is in the debate over the future of Hyderabad.[14] Concretely, it is asserted that, if the people of Telangana want to separate from Andhra Pradesh and form a new state, they are welcome to do so but they should leave Hyderabad—the capital city, which sits in the center of Telangana, is surrounded by it and is miles away from the other regions—to the other region (sometimes referred to as *Seemandhra*), since the latter had "developed" it and brought it to its present glory. Initially, such claims were read as absurd, not least because the city of Hyderabad was founded in the 16th century and "developed" through the ages by a variety of peoples and regimes. But there is a specific logic, one in tune with the coloniality of the Telugu fantasy, to this appropriative claim also.

Spiriting away Hyderabad

Founded and built a few centuries before the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh, there is a lot to be written and said about the city of Hyderabad.[15] Among other things, that it is many cities. The contemporary presentation of Hyderabad, as a "high-tech" spectacle called Cyberabad,[16] serves as a template for powerful capitalist desires. Out of a complex history of hybrid social relationships, Hyderabad has been scripted, especially under Chandrababu Naidu, as a signature site—visible, legible and desirable—for global capital.

The materialization of that signature, its visibility from afar, its legibility to an audience of investors and producers, is a fascinating story of the transformation of a local place into a global brand and the equally spectacular production of an opacity to the people in the slums and *gallis*/streets, districts and villages, also in and around Hyderabad.[17] Whether it is cotton farmer suicides and weaver deaths from starvation in Warangal, the exodus of labor to other countries from Mahaboobnagar, fluorosis in Nalgonda—these are not the images that accompany

Hyderabad's globality. As Kingshuk Nag, the Hyderabad editor of the *Times of India*, observes in his book *Battleground Telangana*:

> A good example of the poor economic development in Telangana can be seen in Medak, a district that borders Greater Hyderabad. On the roads of Medak, not more than an hour and half from Hyderabad, it is possible to run into nomads traveling on bullock carts with all their belongings. These people have no home or hearth and move from place to place within the district in search of jobs. Many others, who have some place to live, migrate seasonally in the months of summer not only in search of jobs but also looking for sources of drinking water. Many come to Hyderabad looking for jobs as daily wagers in construction works. From the neighbouring district of Mahbubnagar, people migrate in lakhs to places as far as Mumbai and north India. Most of them take up jobs in the construction industry—as labour engaged in building roads, irrigation works, etc. So large is the migration that the labourers have built their own brand identity. They are called Palamoor labour (after Palamoor, the old name for Mahbubnagar district) and contractors round them up and transport them to distant places.
>
> (2011: 113)

Nag, after an even more damning survey of the condition of the districts around, observes scathingly: "It has never bothered the rulers of Andhra Pradesh that districts so close to Hyderabad and its showcase Cyberabad (which boasts of investments from multinationals) wallow in poverty in the way that Medak and Mahbubnagar do."[18] He cites V. Venkataramana, head of the local School of Management, who observes:

> Whatever development there has been in Telangana has been in Hyderabad or more specifically in the Cyberabad enclave of the city. Travel outside Hyderabad and there is absolutely nothing. This is a pity and is the real tragedy of Telangana.
>
> (2011: 118)

The production of a spectacle for global capital, leveraging itself from a small slice of a historically plural city, produces a blindness to the other "globalities" in the same space: the globality of malnutrition as well as the globality of labour migration, to name only two. Read through the lens of capital, Hyderabad is legible as one specific sign of the global. In foregrounding that sign, other globalities have been shaded

out so that the region within and around the city itself is produced as a blank scape, having virtually nothing to write or talk about, nothing in common with what the world might find significant. Telangana, in whose integuments Hyderabad is enveloped, disappears ("there is absolutely nothing"). Only Hyderabad looms large. So, if Telangana is of any concern to the proponents of a united Andhra Pradesh (*Samaikya Andhra*), it is a concern only to the extent that it carries Hyderabad within itself. The problems raised by the Telangana movement get translated into the question of: How to wrest Hyderabad, how to save it or sever it, from its location inside Telangana?

The Telangana movement's demand for its separation from Andhra Pradesh is, therefore, not seen as a problem as long as Hyderabad is left with the latter. The fact that Hyderabad is in the center of the region of Telangana and miles away from the other two regions is not seemingly an issue. What is argued is that Hyderabad "belongs" not to those who live and have lived in it but to those who have "developed" it, and the only "development" that counts is what has caught the eye of capital in recent years (Chandrababu Naidu claims, quite proudly, that his Telugu Desam party had developed Hyderabad more in nine years than the Nizam and earlier rulers had in the past 400 years).[19] It is in this seemingly commonsensical claim about "developing" Hyderabad and therefore possessing the rights to it that the colonial logic of Teluguness—its capacity to continuously appropriate the commons in the name of a Telugu identity—becomes most evident. In this appropriation, the Andhra-Telugu understanding of themselves as enterprising spirits driven by a rational and progressive vision, unlike the emotional people of Telangana held back by retrograde sentiments, plays a crucial role.

Telangana sentiment, Andhra enterprise

Given this discourse of enterprise and progress in Andhra Pradesh, what Telangana is offered is cultural credit. This cultural credit, unwarranted and unasked for but pushed on it anyway, offers the seeming opportunity for the cultural, social, and eventually, economic improvement of Telangana. We are all Telugu speaking and, while you might speak it improperly, and might be backward socially, surely you can improve with our help. Progress involves learning to speak the proper Telugu. Improvement implies getting rid of your backward practices, becoming more rational in your social and economic outlook. Improvement entails transforming oneself into a "progressive" farmer, using modern techniques and technologies in your fields. Improvement means learning to be "enterprising" and not laid-back and lazy. How can any Telangana

person, presented as speaking improper Telugu, constructed as lacking modern agricultural practices, produced as requiring progressive politics, refuse this cultural credit, refuse this opportunity to be better, to be more enterprising, offered so graciously under the banner of Telugu unity?

And yet, after more than 50 years of this Teluguness being offered for Telangana's improvement, if Telangana continues to refuse this cultural credit, then so be it. We will go our way. But we will claim what is rightfully ours, which is whatever we have developed, whatever we have made "valuable," whatever we have "improved," whatever has become "better" because of us. Hyderabad thus comes to be seen not as something that is connected integrally to those who live in it, to those who have been there historically, from wherever they might be, but as the legitimate property of those "enterprising" investors who have "developed" it (built its malls, its international airport, flyovers), "improved" it, made it other than, better than, its earlier, selves.

Within this Telugu culture of development, improvement and enterprise, where ownership rights accrue only to those who ostensibly add value, how can this not make sense? It is absurd that the activists for Telangana insist that Hyderabad is connected to those who live and have lived in and around it. This is just "sentiment," not reason. It is emotion, not logic. We all know that the underdeveloped people of Telangana tend to be emotional and, not surprisingly, prone to killing themselves for a song or a sentiment. And yet, what if Andhra enterprise emerges not from the bedrock of progressive reason but from sentiment too? What if capitalist enterprise itself is not only a matter of sentiment, but of "whim and chance"?

Sentimental capital

> [Indian] PM directs Finance Ministry Officials: "Revive the animal spirit[s] in the country's economy."[20]

> "India's animal economics: Is the country an elephant, a tiger or maybe even a beehive?"[21]

After the financial crisis of 2008, and the failure of orthodox economists to foresee or forestall it, John Maynard Keynes was back in the public discourse, particularly in the United States. While Keynesian talk signaled a renewed, if reluctant, acknowledgement of the crucial role of governments in stabilizing capitalist economies, economists also drew on Keynes's concept of "animal spirits" to rethink the rational actor models dominating their discipline. In *The General Theory of Employment,*

Interest and Money, Keynes (1936: 161, emphasis added) had, in writing about how expectations of the future shape the stability and instability of investments in a capitalist economy, observed:

> Even apart from the instability due to speculation, there is the instability due to the characteristic of human nature that *a large proportion* of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation, whether moral or hedonistic or economic. *Most*, probably, *of our decisions* to do something positive, the full consequences of which will be drawn out over many days to come, can only be taken as a result of animal spirits—of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities. Enterprise only pretends to itself…

I will address the question of the incomplete last sentence in the quote above further down. But, for now, Keynes is telling us, in the passage above, that a) "animal spirits" are our "spontaneous urge[s] to action rather than inaction"; b) it is "animal spirits" rather than mathematical calculations that propel our decisions to act (particularly those decisions whose "full" consequences only unravel over the future); and c) either a "large proportion" or "most" of our "positive activities" depend on "animal spirits" rather than mathematical expectation. It is somewhat unclear how exactly animal spirits stand in relation to mathematical expectation (in terms of proportion) but there is little need to doubt that, for Keynes at least, they are a significant force in economic activity. In short, Keynes is positing "animal spirits" as a powerful motivator of human action.

Explicitly drawing on animal spirits, economists George Akerlof and Robert Shiller (2009: ix, emphasis added), in a book titled *Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism*, claim: "Keynes appreciated that *most* economic activity results from rational economic motivations—but also that *much* economic activity is governed by animal spirits." Torn between rationality and animal spirits, Akerlof and Shiller interpret Keynes as apportioning "most" economic activity to the former while still reserving "much" for the latter. They continue:

> People have noneconomic motives. And they are not always rational in pursuit of their economic interests. In Keynes' view these animal spirits are the main cause for why the economy fluctuates as it does. They are also the main cause of involuntary employment. To

> understand the economy then is to comprehend how it is driven by animal spirits.
>
> (2009: ix)

Without denying the importance of rational economic motivations ("most economic activity results from rational economic motivations") in the governance of economic activity, Akerlof and Shiller, relying on Keynes, carefully carve out a crucial role for animal spirits ("much economic activity is governed by animal spirits"), especially when it comes to the fluctuations of the economy. This allows them to work towards the stronger and more general claim that understanding the economy requires understanding its relationship to ("how it is driven by") animal spirits. That is, rather than focus only on rational motivations, Akerlof and Shiller enable their fellow economists to ask, without too much unease, about the role "animal spirits" play in driving the economy.[22]

Hooking up with Keynes from a different side of the orthodox spectrum, seeking to understand the causes of the "almost universally unanticipated crisis of September 2008," especially the question of why "macromodeling unequivocally failed when it was needed most," wondering, "What went wrong? Why was virtually every economist and policy maker of note so off about so large an issue?" Alan Greenspan, the former Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, also invokes animal spirits—amending them somewhat—while simultaneously claiming a long familiarity with them and "their quirkiness":

> My inquiry begins with an examination of "animal spirits," the term that John Maynard Keynes famously coined to refer to "a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the [rational] outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities." Keynes was talking about *the spirit that impels economic activity*, but we now amend his notion of animal spirits to include its obverse, fear-driven risk aversion. I had long been aware of such "spirits" and "their quirkiness."
>
> (2013: 8–9, emphasis added)

If economic activity is driven, in significant ways, by "spirits," animal or human, quirky or strait-laced, what does one do with such spirits? How does "a secular subject" deal with the problems posed by "practices in which … spirits … have agency in the world?" (Chakrabarty 2000: 72). Akerlof and Shiller (2009: ix) translate animal spirits into "confidence," "fairness," "corruption," "money illusion" and "stories." Introducing these "five different aspects" (Akerlof and Shiller 2009: 5) of

animal spirits into their analysis allows them to "explain the underlying instabilities of capitalism" and also argue for a more active role for governments in managing the "creativity" and "excesses" of capitalism ("The proper role of the government … is to set the stage. The stage should give full rein to the creativity of capitalism. But it should also countervail the excesses that occur because of our animal spirits" (Akerlof and Shiller 2009: ix–x)). Alan Greenspan (2013: 9), in contrast, translates animal spirits as "specific behavioral imperatives"—for example, "euphoria, fear, panic, optimism"—in order to "explore how they, and the cultures they foster, interact with rational economic behavior and spur important market outcomes." His goal is to improve the forecasting abilities of existing economic models and thereby the formulation of economic policy. Greenspan and Akerlof and Shiller translate animal spirits differently but they are all united in calling upon these spirits to deliver what they believe rationality alone cannot deliver in its explanations of capitalist economies.

Irrespective of their journey or destination—animal spirits as a visible prosthetic to the invisible hand or as an intravenous drip into an emaciated *homo economicus*—animal spirits are conjured, in both cases, from a few lines, in section VII of chapter 12 ("The State of Long-Term Expectation") of Keynes's ([1936] 1973) *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.

Pursuing Akerlof and Shiller's and Greenspan's citations, I notice that there are four paragraphs in section VII and the first paragraph is what both Akerlof and Shiller and Greenspan rely on primarily in order to interpret what Keynes means by animal spirits. But Keynes does not stop with those few lines. Keynes continues his elaboration of the role of animal spirits, in the first paragraph itself (and this is where we return to the incomplete sentence that I left with you further back):

> Enterprise only pretends to itself to be mainly actuated by the statements in its own prospectus, however candid and sincere. Only a little more than an expedition to the South Pole, is it based on an exact calculation of benefits to come. Thus if the animal spirits are dimmed and the spontaneous optimism falters, leaving us to depend on nothing but a mathematical expectation, enterprise will fade and die;—though fears of loss may have a basis no more reasonable than hopes of profit had before.
>
> (1973 [1936])

Enterprise is not "actuated"—it only pretends to be—by the statements it issues. If animal spirits are "dimmed," and we are left to rely on

"mathematical expectation" or reason alone, enterprise will only perish. The forms of reason that "enterprise" claims to be driven by—the statements ("an exact calculation of benefits to come") that it makes in the prospectus, however sincere and open—are not what actually drive it: that is only a pretense. What drives it, more or less, is what drives an expedition to the South Pole: animal spirits. Animal spirits motivate enterprise and keep it alive. But how do animal spirits do this, how do they sustain enterprise more effectively than mathematical expectation or reason? Keynes tackles this question in the second paragraph:

> It is safe to say that enterprise which depends on hopes stretching into the future benefits the community as a whole. But individual initiative will only be adequate when reasonable calculation is *supplemented* and *supported* by animal spirits, so that the thought of ultimate loss which often overtakes pioneers, as experience undoubtedly tells us and them, is put aside as a healthy man puts aside the expectation of death.
>
> (1973 [1936], emphasis added)

Enterprise depends on "hopes stretching into the future" i.e. hope projected over time. But, in order for hope to extend into the future in a sustainable way, it must deal with the limits of death: with the idea of human mortality, with finitude and perishability, that is, the long-term meaningfulness of human actions taken in the present. Human beings are capable of asking: given the reasonable "expectation of death," how meaningful, really, is an expedition to the South Pole? What is its present and future significance? How does undertaking this enterprising/pioneering activity compare to the multiple other ways of being human, relating meaningfully, with and to others, in the present?

The animal spirits that Keynes evokes come in as an answer to this questioning capacity of human beings ("the thought of ultimate loss"). That is, thought that we know or are capable of knowing, in other ways ("the thought of ultimate loss which often overtakes pioneers, as experience undoubtedly tells us and them") is prevented from "overtaking us." Animal spirits get us to "put aside" "thought[s] of ultimate loss." Keynes, thus, presents animal spirits as "supplementing" and "supporting" "reasonable calculation." But this supplementing role is a support primarily in the sense of preventing "calculation" from crossing certain boundaries. Animal spirits limit our thinking of the future and thus help keep it "reasonable." In this refusal to foresee and think the ultimate it is akin to the actions of the "healthy man" who, in a similar fashion, puts aside the "expectation of death."

Keynes's animal spirits produce "enterprise" by regulating what counts as healthy thought: they police calculation and, by limiting it, make it appear reasonable. But since such reasonableness alone cannot drive enterprise, they also come in as "spontaneous urges" to motivate human action from beyond the boundaries of the reasonable. Animal spirits thus not only supplement calculative thought but also make enterprise possible.

But the regulative actions of Keynes's animal spirits, precisely through their policing, also end up pointing to the presence of other spirits, other possible thoughts, other ways of thinking and relating to health, death and ultimate loss on a routine basis. Keynes does not deal with these foreign forms of human life: foreign thoughts and foreign ideas of health, but he does flesh out the contours of the domesticated economy of reason and animal spirits—a sentimental economy?—within which enterprise is nurtured and a distinctive type of healthy human centered. He does it, in the third paragraph, by telling us who the main protagonist of this economy is and what is needed to sustain this protagonist in a healthy fashion into the future:

> This means, unfortunately, not only that slumps and depressions are exaggerated in degree, but that economic prosperity is excessively dependent on a political and social atmosphere which is congenial to the average business man. … In estimating the prospects of investment, we must have regard, therefore, to the nerves and hysteria and even the digestions and reactions to the weather of those upon whose spontaneous activity it largely depends.

What this domesticated economy of allowable thought (a constitutive outcome of the limiting of reasonable calculation by animal spirits) produces, centers and sustains, then, is an "atmosphere which is congenial to the average business man." Enterprise and economic prosperity are hostage to the actions of this average business man and his health is therefore of primary concern. It is for these reasons that, when we think (estimate) the "prospects of investment," we must "have regard for the nerves and hysteria and even the digestions and reactions to the weather of" the "average business man."

A prosperous economy is a domesticated economy of healthy thought (with calculations that are reasonable and spontaneous optimisms that productively supplement calculations) and it produces a social and political atmosphere in which the average business man can be enterprising. The wealth of nations comes thus to rest on producing an ecology conducive to the health of the average business man: a person who calculates but does not think too much or too far, a person who acts but whose enterprising actions are driven primarily by animal spirits.

A domesticated economy driven by animal spirits and centered on calming the nerves and hysteria of the average business man need not however be an "irrational" one. In keeping with this, in the fourth and concluding paragraph of section VII, Keynes sees the "state of long-term expectation" as "steady" and not as something that "depends on waves of irrational psychology." Even when it is a little bit unsteady, there are "other factors" with their "compensating effects." What was crucial, Keynes points out, was to remind ourselves that human decisions ("whether personal or political or economic") "affecting the future cannot depend on strict mathematical expectation, since the basis for making such calculations does not exist." What makes "the wheels go round" (what drives human decisions) is "our innate urge to activity." Our "rational selves" "calculat[e] where we can." But we "often fal[l] back for our motive on whim, sentiment, or chance."[23] That is, Keynes reminds us, as he concludes section VII, that human decisions, particularly those relating to capitalist enterprise, depend for their motive, mostly, on "whim, sentiment, or chance."

In four paragraphs, Keynes has displaced rational calculation/mathematical expectation by invoking animal spirits, shown how animal spirits drive enterprise, identified the human subject whose health is central for the prosperity of capitalist economies and located the deeper basis of capitalist enterprise, not in reason, but in "whim, sentiment, or chance." If human decisions based on "whim, sentiment, or chance" shape the future and do not necessarily destabilize it, it is pertinent to ask what other animal spirits—spirits other than those creating an atmosphere conducive primarily to the health and appetites of the "average business man," what foreign spirits—might exist in this world? How might they—these other spirits conjurable from whim, sentiment or chance—be called forth? What other economies of health and wealth, which other "average beings," what other reasonably human subjectivities, can they be primarily responsive to?

Unhealthy thoughts and untimely spirits

The capitalist economy, then, is a sentimental assemblage. Centered on the health (nerves, hysteria, digestion and reactions to the weather) of the average business man, it has its own temperament: sentiments that limit thought to "reasonable calculations," sentiments that boost the spirit of enterprise and confidence, sentiments that promote practices conducive to steady consumption, production and accumulation.

Is it possible to imagine economies with other temperaments in the case of Seemandhra and Telangana? Maybe shared horizons in which the

partner with the greater animal spirits, instead of translating that drive into additional, and immediate, partisan gain, works to redress those limitations in the name of a common future? If the project of integration of Telugu-speaking areas was seen as *Visaalandhra* or "Greater Andhra" by one of the partners, what exactly was the idea of the "greater" if not, possibly, the promise of a better commons for all Telugu-speaking regions?[24] Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, in expressing strong reservations about merging Telangana into Andhra, is reported to have said that the idea of *Visaalandhra* smacked of "expansionist imperialism."[25] But, if he eventually went along with it, was it because he was somehow okay with "imperialism" or more likely because he came to see that the idea of sub-national integration also held another promise, the possibility of enhancing collective well-being? What remains of that other promise of the commons? Where does one look for those other spirits or other, sentimental, assemblages?

Notes

1 Luther, Narendra. "A Valet, a Shop, a Bazar," *Narendra Luther Archives*, January 1, 1998. http://narendralutherarchives.blogspot.com/1998_01_01_archive.html.
2 On NTR, see Narayan, S. Venkat. *NTR: A Biography*. New Delhi: Vikas, 1983.
3 Kumar, Shanti. "Mapping Tollywood: The Cultural Geography of 'Ramoji Film City' in Hyderabad," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23(2) 2006.
4 See Muppidi, Himadeep. *The Politics of the Global*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004.
5 Baru, Sanjaya. "Sanjaya Baru: The Uniqueness of Professor Raj," *Business Standard*, February 15, 2010. www.business-standard.com/india/news/sanjaya-baruuniquenessprofessor-raj/385690.
6 For a review of one of these wedding malls, see www.fullhyderabad.com/profile/locations/41040/2/clothing-in-hyderabad-india/somajiguda/kalaniketan-wedding-mall-review.
7 Ram, M. Kodanda. "Movement for Telangana State: A Struggle for Autonomy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (2), January 13–19, 2007: 90–94.
8 Jayashankar, K. "Telangana: The Demand for a Separate State," The First Annual Biyyala Janardhan Rao Memorial Lecture, January, 2003. Available at www.etelangana.org.
9 Examples abound. For instance, when the Nizam's state of Hyderabad was "liberated" by the Indian army, the military administration of Hyderabad imported "staff" from the Madras presidency. The experience with this, mostly Telugu, staff from the Madras presidency was deeply negative. So, even before integration, in 1952, there was a strong public protest (the *non-mulki* agitation) against the proposal, a protest in which six students died in police firing. www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6FldFlhbic.
10 Ibid.

11 Much of the economic argument for the separation of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh revolves around claims of the diversion of resources from Telangana for the use of the other regions. Particularly striking in this respect is the claim that, though Telangana is flanked by two major rivers, whose waters could easily have been used for the benefit of its farmers, those waters have been systematically diverted and utilized for regions further down. But the arguments that apply to water also apply to other common resources such as land, forests, employment and educational opportunities. What is especially galling, it is argued, are the legally doubtful means – i.e. special manipulations of state power—through which the large-scale acquisition and alienation of many of these resources has occurred.
12 Muppidi, Himadeep. "Annadammula Anubandham: Telugu Culture and the Other Cotton," *Telangana Matters*, 3 June, 2011. http://telanganamatters.org/2011/06/03/annadammula-anubandham-cotton-worship-and-telugu-culture.
13 HMTV's Dasha Disha televised discussions are an exception. See excerpts on YouTube.
14 "Srikrishna Committee Report." *Committee for Consultations on the Situation in Andhra Pradesh*, (December, 2010), http://pib.nic.in/archieve/others/2011/jan/d2011010502.pdf.
15 See Chekuri, Christopher and Himadeep Muppidi. "Diasporas Before and After the Nation: Displacing the Modern," *Interventions* 5(1) 2003: 45–57.
16 Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone, 1994.
17 Nag, Kingshuk. *Battleground Telangana: Chronicle of an Agitation*. Noida: Harper Collins India, 2011 (Chapter 6).
18 Ibid.
19 See the exchange between Akbaruddin Owaisi and Chandrababu Naidu, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Debates, January 20, 2014. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6BtgNmpsiU.
20 https://twitter.com/PMOIndia/status/217982843584905216.
21 Lakshmi, Rama. "India's Animal Economics: Is the Country an Elephant, a Tiger or maybe even a Beehive?," *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2013. Available at www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/04/05/indias-animal-economics-is-the-country-an-elephant-a-tiger-or-maybe-even-a-beehive (accessed January 26, 2014).
22 Why do I invoke unease in the context of thinking about animal spirits? Talking about historians, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 72) astutely observes that: "A secular subject like history faces certain problems in handling practices in which gods, spirits, or the supernatural have agency in the world." I suspect that animal spirits, notwithstanding their conceptualization as "spontaneous urges to action," arouse a somewhat similar unease in a secular enterprise such as economics. But the spirit of Keynes is helpful in calming the unease.
23 Keynes, J.M. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, [1936] pp. 162–63.
24 The idea of *Visaalandhra*/Greater Andhra, this imagined and linguistically integrated community, found expression through a number of metaphors, including that of marriage, evoking, as it did, a linguistic-sexual contract. Nehru, for instance, is known to have remarked that the merger of Telangana with Andhra was akin to that of a "naughty" lad with a naïve girl and that, in case the union did not work out, the latter had every right to

divorce. Perhaps, believing in the common Telugu saying, "vanda abbadaalu cheppianna pelli cheyyali" ("One must, if necessary, tell a hundred lies to make a marriage"), the integration went through, with many qualifications and promises as well as fears. The ambiguity between promise and peril from the formation of a Telugu community is somewhat evident in the safeguards put in place for Telangana to facilitate the integration (one of them explicitly titled as a "Gentlemen's Agreement"). It is through a few processes of reassurance that the state of Andhra Pradesh was formed from the merger of the two regions on November 1, 1956.

25 "Telangana: Prof. Kodandaram Speech in T.V.V. Meeting," www.youtube.com/watch?v=6A3c0BzCH24&feature=related.

4 Sibilant hills

Eavesdropping on Telangana talk, especially in Telugu, I cannot but catch the rich citations to foreign and familiar figures. If the statues dumped into Tank Bund bring up the Taliban for some, then Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's lines grace the Telangana critique of texts in Telugu. If Arthur Cotton is evoked to celebrate modernity, then Frantz Fanon is deployed to warn of the colonial tactics of the ruling regime.[1] The citational ease speaks to long-standing intimacies with political movements across the world and with non-Telugu literatures. The "Maoists" in Andhra Pradesh have long been inspired by revolutionary struggles in China while, more recently, the Telangana movement was quick to learn from the Arab Spring and organize its own Million March in March 2011. The regional spring plumbs waters from elsewhere.

But rather than map these underground streams and subterranean globalities, I will lead you to a small Telangana hill and the words of a local teacher. I want you to heed the voice of Mr. Vuppu Lingaiah, "resident of Kondannapally village of Gangadhara Mandal of Karimnagar district in Andhra Pradesh." Mr. Vuppu Lingaiah began by identifying himself thus in a letter he wrote to the Director of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh. Village; Mandal; District: Kondannapally; Gangadhara; Karimnagar. These are places outside of Hyderabad city, and, possibly, outside of urbane understanding. Perhaps that is why Mr. Lingaiah was locating himself, circle by circle, offering a path to the place he was writing from. Where was he writing from? From a village whose name the Director was unlikely to know and about something near it, a hill, that would be even more unfamiliar. But the hill, that small hill near a small village, had a name, an affectionate name, a history, and—and this is where the Director was needed—was in danger of being killed. But why would the Director of a Government Department, located in the capital city of more than 6 million people in a region of 70 million people, be bothered by the likely

death, if it was imaginable as such, of a small hill near an unknown village in a land teeming with villages, hills and peoples? Of course, Mr. Lingaiah needed to raise the stakes, make his words do more, if the Director was to pay any attention to him. And raise them he did by arguing, "humbly submit[ting]," that the fate of the hill was crucial to not just the village but to "entire mankind":

> I am Vuppu Lingaiah, resident of Kondannapally village of Gangadhara Mandal of Karimnagar district in Andhra Pradesh hereby humbly submit that there are very ancient caves and stone inscriptions of Jainism situated atop our village hill fondly called by all the villagers Bommalammagutta (Gutta means hill in Telugu). It is situated on the state highway from Karimnagar to Jagitial Road exactly at the 18th Kilometre stone between Kondannapally and Kurikyala villages. It lies in a vast plot survey no.115, consisting of 49.10 acres of land. There is a sacred water fountain in the middle of the hill, which we drink while we climb to have a *darshan* of the holy Goddess Bommalammatatalli. Every year we … villagers celebrate a *jatara* in the month of *Shravana*. The villagers climb the hill and offer prayers to the deities, break coconuts. The villagers shirk any important work ahead of them, but they definitely participate in this *jatara*. They come from nearby Karimnagar and Hyderabad and even Mumbai to participate and pray to this Goddess. Because of its appearance, it is called *Vrishabhadri* (*Vrishabha* in Sanskrit means Bull) in recorded history books. This hill has been entered into the historical books of Telangana and Andhra. Its importance is written in recorded history books. But the mining Mafia people have already [applied] to the Mining Department for permission to plunder this great hill into pieces. This hill is not an exaggeration to say that it is a part and parcel of the cultural, emotional, psychological development of all the villagers born in our village and also to two other surrounding villages called Nyalakondannapally and Kurikyala. This hill, apart from its rich anti[que] value, is of far greater significance to our village and entire mankind.[2]

In the rest of this letter, Mr. Lingaiah proceeded to lay out, in wonderful detail worth reading very closely in its own right, the particular ways in which the hill was central to, as he put it in the passage above "the cultural, emotional and psychological development of all the villagers born in our village and also to two other surrounding villages." But let me first deal with the part I have quoted here.

I am struck by the term, "fondly." Mr. Lingaiah gives the Director the state's measures (location on the highway, plot number, acreage, village, mandal, district) that would allow the hill to be located on an official map/gazette, but he takes care to or cannot help giving the Director the emotional topography also: "our village hill fondly called by all the villagers Bommalammagutta." In parentheses, he adds, for he probably imagines that the Director might not know Telugu fluently, a not unlikely proposition given the pan-Indian nature of the Indian Administrative Service whose personnel might hold this post, "Gutta means hill in Telugu." Mr. Lingaiah is a patient teacher. In sketching the governmental and emotional layout of the hill and carefully translating the linguistic terms, Mr. Lingaiah is making sure that the Director, his pupil here but also the hill's likely savior, can see the hill through his own, i.e. the state's eyes, while also bringing it alive in terms of its life for the villagers. There are important archaeological monuments worth preserving here, but there is also much more.

In highlighting the "much more" of a small hill, this letter evokes for me other lands, other times and another text. I am reminded of *Cities of Salt*, where Abdelrahman Munīf so poignantly depicts the devastation that is about to visit *Wadi al-Uyoun*. Munīf writes:

> For anyone who remembers those long-ago days, when a place called Wadi al-Uyoun used to exist, and a man named Miteb al-Hatal, and a brook, and trees, and a community of people used to exist, the three things that still break his heart in recalling those days are the tractors which attacked the orchards like ravenous wolves, tearing up the trees and throwing them to the earth one after another, and leveled all the orchards between the brook and the fields. After destroying the first grove of trees, the tractors turned to the next with the same bestial voracity and uprooted them. The trees shook violently and groaned before falling, cried for help, wailed, panicked, called out in helpless pain and then fell entreatingly to the ground, as if trying to snuggle into the earth to grow and spring forth alive again.[3]

In mourning their death, Munīf resurrects the orchards lying between the brook and the fields and the community that they sustained. In memorializing them, he reveals the war that was waged on the unsuspecting villagers. There was Wadi al-Uyoun, a village, an oasis, and now, today, there is a massive city. The city overflows our screens, drains our minds and buries other possibilities of life. But its emergence, Munīf reminds us, is predated by, is predicated on, an earlier encounter: a ferocious, bestial, predatory war.

Mr. Lingaiah conjures to the surface, in a manner similar to Munīf, the complexity of a community and the forms of everyday life that are imbricated in very small, easily invisible, hills and villages in Telangana. In mining the hill, in taking the rocks away ("plunder this great hill to pieces"), the miners will be tearing ferociously at the ties making communities in three villages. He is warning the Director (and us) of the encounter to come, of the social death that is in the near future of the hill and the villages woven into it.

In seeking to ward off this predatory meeting, Mr. Lingaiah mobilizes an unusual alliance: history and archaeology, as well as gods and goddesses. His letter highlights, at first, the archeological and historical importance of the caves, stone carvings and inscriptions on the hill, dating back, as he states it, to AD 946. Even on the sole criteria—ancientness/antiquity—of likely interest to the Director of Archaeology and Museums, the hill needs protection: AD 946 or economic development, ancient stone inscriptions or smooth and polished granite for export, preserve the past or make the future?

But I am also drawn by what else slides through that initial opening to history and antiquity: custard apple trees on the hill, the firewood that villagers gather, the 3,000 sheep and assorted cattle that graze on it, the 200 *Yadava* families dependent on those sheep and cattle for a livelihood. They, along with Mr. Lingaiah's biography, all tumble through this small opening that modernity reserves for history. Delving into his own past, identifying himself as around 42 years of age, Mr. Lingaiah alerts the Director, and less directly us, to the wild animals (leopards, bears, and smaller animals) he has seen there since he was a child and tells of the ways in which this hill, as the major source of "water harvesting," feeds small lakes on its right and left, lakes that then flow into other tanks and rivers. Now that you know this hill, this hill which we fondly call *Bommalammagutta*, maybe you can see how "mining" it will poison the waters, drive off or kill the animals and devastate the community of villages and villagers.

Mr. Vuppu Lingaiah is a teacher. And he is teaching us, tree by wood, stone by granite, how addition and accumulation on one register is subtraction and devastation on a few others. He is sketching the loving ecology of a small hill, a really small one, on our reasonably calculating minds and our state-eyed mappings of the world. He is writing to woo our animal spirits for micro forms of life whose auditions we cannot see or hear: sheep, bears, shepherds, goddesses, lakes and tanks. In speaking to the archeological importance of *Bommalammagutta*, Mr. Lingaiah is perhaps addressing the colonial-governmental legacy of the Indian state, its obsession with monumental history and what is recoverable and

recordable in history books. But in vividly describing local communities and their communal lives he is probably expressing a continued faith in the Indian officials' postcolonial sentiments. He is writing for a world constituted other than as a world that has already been, in Spivak's felicitous reading, won over for calculation (*Death of a Discipline*, 2005, p. 54). Mr. Vuppu Lingaiah is a teacher.

To those of us who travel only between cities in India, by-passing villages, the things brought to life in Mr. Lingaiah's letter are but fleeting signs that we catch from the glass curtain of a car, train or bus. Grazing cattle, sheep on a hill, shepherds, trees and, maybe, wild animals sometimes: all would pass you by in a slow but steady blur from the distance of busy highways and train lines. It is probably not a dissimilar flash for those who see value in those rocks, value addition in their make-over into granite and new buildings and new rest-area facilities where once there were, as they see it, only bushes and rocks. As Amitav Ghosh points out, in a not dissimilar context, these are life-forms that are expected to disappear over time, into their appropriate slots in the past; cattle, sheep and shepherds on a hill are signs of that which will, which must, fade soon into history as the modern reorganizes us all. You see such sights in passing; even if you sometimes linger there, your eventual destination, and home, is the city.

But Mr. Lingaiah's letter interrupts that transition to allow the fullness of the hill and the forms of communal life that it sustains to translate themselves into our curtailed imaginations. In that slowing, three villages and many forms of community come alive. Value-added rocks and economic growth on one side, situated memories and singular forms of communal life centered around *jataras*—impossible to rehabilitate once sundered—as well as fondly named hills on the other. What would it mean now for development to voraciously attack that communal life, to wage war against that local culture and communities?

I take another look at the picture of *Bommalammagutta* and it is a bit more difficult now, to someone otherwise unfamiliar with this hill, to see it only as a flash, as a transitional moment, as a form of life that must fade; to see only stones and shrubs: stones that can be dug, blasted, made over into granite, shipped across oceans, in order, among other things, to push India's rate of growth closer towards China's (10 percent, 10 percent, 10 percent). That other reading of a shared global, of an international system in which India and China are supposedly both "emerging" and racing each other in terms of rates of growth, that other reading, stubs itself on Mr. Lingaiah's letter. His words prod us out of that narrative of progress and development where the promise of the "future is here" (the slogan of the Andhra Pradesh Industrial

Infrastructure Corporation—APIIC) and open up an alternative zone of translation, a different imaginary, in which the past, the future and the present are entangled in a more complex now. This letter projects a *Wadi al-Uyoun* that is about to be destroyed-developed into a Saudi Arabia or a Singapore City (one of the more favored names of real-estate developments outside Hyderabad) and seeks to protect the *Wadi* by conjuring up all that is proper and valuable about it in the here and now. It portrays and freezes our gaze on the moment of predation and makes us wonder if we are really okay with the encounter to come.

Indian corporate officials coming back after quick and frequent visits to China, impressed by the ever-expanding webs of the built infrastructure there, bemoan Indian "irrationalities," wondering[4] why it takes so long to build the necessary infrastructure for "growth" in India and couldn't one please hurry these processes. Of course, the answer for the swerving and slowing is well known—the irrational will of idiosyncratic citizens, enfranchised, easily annoyed and litigious—as are the dictatorial dreams for somehow by-passing these millions of wills through special economic zones.

Thus, ranged against these small hills, smaller villages and idiosyncratic if firmly political wills, hundreds of millions of them, is a more organized and focused framing of economic development that locates "the cultural, emotional, psychological development of all" at a higher zone than the village, i.e. as the nation's interest. This is a powerful framing that has already resulted in a number of hills in Telangana disappearing. The plundered remains ("small pieces of this great hill") of *Bommalammaguttas* garnish suburban homes the world over.

Prof. Sujatha Surepally, who is part of an organization (*Telangana Bhoomi Rakshana Sangham*) fighting against this denudation and reconfiguration of Telangana's basic topography bemoans the depredation: "Tomorrow, you can get a car from the US or a refrigerator from South Korea, but once we have turned these hills into granite, how are we going to get these hills back?"[5] "What is the point of having a Telangana that is a desert?" she wonders. The banners of the organization she is part of, hung in the villages of many Telangana districts, point out that "Quarries are our *Ghories*" (tombs). Now, if they put it that way, even we can see what the Indian nation's future will demand of village bodies in the now. In people like Mr. Lingaiah and Prof. Surepally, you see the Mitebs who are fighting back, hill by hill, village by village, by Special Economic Zone (SEZ), community by community, word by word.

In Mr. Lingaiah's letter, "humbly submitted," are words in motion that signal, testify to, stand up for, an idea of a commons larger than himself: a hill that also holds up a village or three, a couple of lakes,

some sheep, a few wild animals, a hill in which there is also, easily evident to him, something common to "mankind." Ambitious as that claim may seem in a letter from a teacher in a village to the state Director of Archaeology, it reminds us of what is at stake in the past that is in the present around us. Against the APIIC's vision of "The future is here," Mr. Lingaiah asserts that the past is here too and, just maybe, in a more significant way. Mr. Director, could you please look into it? Mr. Lingaiah is not writing to his MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) or the local political party but to the Director of Archaeology, an institution of the state that is probably not as easily assimilated into the parts devoted to "infrastructure" development or rapid accumulation.

This appeal, not necessarily to a political party, but to another institution, one based on the preservation of the past, is not accidental. As Prof. Surepally articulates very well, the saving of hills from mining corporations is a struggle whose politics is not always shared even by some of the political parties fighting for a separate Telangana. Many of these parties do not understand why the "development" of the Telangana region is being opposed. Why are these villagers coming in the way of progress? The professor herself has been the target of virulent attacks on these grounds. Development is a word in motion, too, rolling over many who come in its way.

Sejulu

When I first came across *sejulu*, it didn't, as a word, quite roll. But discussions of economic liberalization in Hyderabad always involved *sejulu* talk. And when *sejulu* was attached to Polepally and Kakinada and you settled in a little more, you saw what burdens *sejulu* carried: A Special Economic Zone, had morphed into *sej* in Telugu and the multiplicity of that was *sejulu*.

There are, of course, many debates, discussions, videos and blogs on this issue of SEZs in India. Andhra Pradesh has the dubious distinction of having sanctioned the most number of SEZs, while the Communist Government of West Bengal had the, maybe more odious, distinction of killing protesting villagers, a disaster that was followed by its first electoral loss of power in that state in 34 years. The names of places like Singur and Nandigram haunt the Communist Party of India (Marxist) as effectively as Polepally and Kakinada hover over Andhra Pradesh politics. In many of these battles between people living on the land and the local/state governments, designating the land as a special zone, there are a number of common themes that emerge, themes probably implicated in other battles in other parts of the world.

Very often, the people who are dispossessed by these zones protest that the compensation is either inadequate or has, by the time it comes to them, been reduced to a trickle because so many have taken their cut. Many of the displaced are also typically the least socially powerful groups in that area (marginal farmers, dalits and tribals in the cases in Andhra Pradesh). Sometimes the governments acquire much larger tracts than is actually needed for an industry, a university or an airport and then use part of that land to "develop" commercial and real estate complexes hand in glove with real estate companies.[6] Abuses abound.

But the core issue is the role of the state and its re-formatting in and through these re-regulations. Even when the farmer sells the land voluntarily, at a price that seems adequate to him or her at the moment of consent, the subsequent re-designation of the place as a special zone shoots up the value of the land acquired into multiples of its initial selling price. This is well before anything has actually been built on those grounds. The act of merely acquiring and turning over the land from one set of owners to another, its re-nomination by the state, changes the "value" that can be realized from it. But this power rests on a betrayal.

In this makeover, the initial sellers, the farmers, are betrayed by a coming transformation, initiated by their state, that is either opaque to them or impossible for them to effect on their own. The agent of this cheating is the state, their representative, the very same state that is seemingly looking after the common interest and acquiring land for a public purpose. If the state knows that it is effecting a new space-economy through its re-zoning practices, how is it that it doesn't make the initial owners an integral part of this new commons, this new public purpose?

At the same time as it buys their land, the state sells out the small farmers. This sell-out occurs when the farmer moves from being the owner of a small piece of land (a means of production) into an account-holder with a smaller amount of cash in the bank (a slowly depreciating commodity or at best a fixed asset that is divided into even smaller amounts within the family). While the former means of production sustained him and his family in a number of ways and made him part of a local community and culture, a place, a hill maybe, the bank account typically displaces him from that embedded-ness and throws him into a new economic space, a wider monetized economy of consumption and production, where his means of surviving in a sustainable fashion, are, at best, limited. In a long familiar story, he returns as a wage laborer to the site that was once a small farm but is now an industrial unit or a housing complex. He returns diminished, not with the claims of a meaningful relationship to the land, not as someone, however small and marginal, who ploughed it, played in it, planted in it and through these relations

made and renewed a historical attachment, but as one among many who seek, by digging or shoveling or carrying bricks and keeping watch, to earn their daily sustenance. That small piece of land, with the trees that he used to tend carefully, has now morphed into a towering complex, a monstrous and alien concreteness that dwarfs him through its indifference to his fate. Who are you, it demands of him? And what is your right to be here?

The state's exercise of its power to exceptionalize the ordinary lay of a place, its capacity to re-define the commons, has dispossessed the small farmer into a day laborer while inflating, through the same magical mediation, a stronger citizen, a private investor, into a multimillionaire. The rationalization that the state offers for this sucking up, this naked redistribution upwards, is the promise of a much richer commons in the near future, i.e. the rapid progress of the "nation" in an international competition with other states engaged in a similar process: China's growing at 10 percent and India must, too. But what are the meanings of that 10 percent for the small farmer turned day-laborer? What is the appeal of that *must* of international competition to their household? What are the moral claims of these national goals on the marginal farmer's small patch of life and land?

The state has an answer to these questions. It might not choose to articulate it explicitly but it has an answer: the marginal farmer's life is a relic of the nation's past; their death has already been foretold. The farmer will disappear in the interests of his children, who, in going to school in the present, represent the real future, of themselves and their nation. But this answer cannot be heard or articulated in the din around "rehabilitation."

For those concerned with the farmer and yet unable to wrest themselves away from the musts of history, the battle is around the "voluntary" nature of the initial consent, the ensuring of an adequate rehabilitation package and maybe the provision of a "fair," corruption-free process. But the story ends, that local story should end, after that process has been cleaned up, has been made as fair and transparent as possible. The fundamental injustice of the state's role in devalorizing the already weaker and inflating the significantly stronger sections of a community, a community seemingly marked by the dream of horizontal solidarities, is not politicized as problematic. But politicization happens anyway.

In a democratic country like India, where the "nonliterate members of the peasantry and the urban working classes" are entitled to the same political rights as the urban, literate sections, the subaltern classes not only have an "active political presence," but "bring into the sphere of the political their own ideas of well-being, justice, gods, spirits, religion, magic, and so on" (Chakrabarty 2002: xix–xx). How well then does the

state's newly regressive role fit with the politically charged expectations of the subaltern classes?

Not very well, if we go by some of the protests currently taking place against SEZs all over India. For Telangana especially, a region where there is already a sense that its future has been constantly deferred in the name of a shared Telugu community, it is not difficult to see how the state's intervention, with its in-built partiality towards the already stronger, place-less investor over the place-based subaltern, fits smoothly into the historical pattern of privileging the outsider: the investor from elsewhere is boosted, while the small Telangana farmer is trampled under. Telangana rolls in then as an explanation of the state's partialities and prejudices and its willingness to violate commonly held understandings of justice, of *nyayamu*. As Lakshmamma, one of the Dalit farmers displaced from her half an acre of land, acquired in the name of an SEZ in Polepally, recounts:

> We are witnessing this cruelty in front of our eyes. The green land is now converted to concrete jungle. These wide roads and long fencing are giving me pain. I always remember those beautiful days of working in the fields with my friends and relatives, throwing jokes to one another. All the castes used to come and they used to take lunch under big mango trees. Now they do not see any more trees as they are all chopped down.[7]

How does she make sense of this transformation, this "cruelty" she is now "witnessing"? According to the report, in which her testimony is available, "[s]he feels that all this is being done because she hails from the Telengana region, which has minerals and natural resources. She hopes, if Telengana becomes a separate state, 'all these Andhra factories will go and we will get our land back perhaps.'"[8] Thanks to the state's mediation, the Andhra investor morphs into the predatory outsider. There is political opportunity but also danger in that reconstitution.

Vernacularity

It is July 7, 2008. Standing outside the gates of the APIIC is a crowd of women and men singing.[9] Someone else is recording the songs and the angry words of the farmers. In the video of the crowds milling and the hustle and bustle generated, I recognize Prof. Sujatha Surepally lending voice and energy to the people agitating outside the gates. I remember Prof. Surepally's words in an interview on etelengana, that, for her at least, the Telangana movement is not about the struggles of the

government employees or the urban or literate classes. She was very explicit that, in any social struggle, the "educated" groups were quite capable of looking after their own interests. Her solidarities were with those non-literate classes whose concerns were marginal to the dominant imagination and who were typically left to their own devices.

As the crowd surges and sings in front of the gates, kept at bay by the police, amidst the swirl of traffic at the back, a banner comes into view: On the top ends of the banner, in Hindi-Urdu words written in Telugu script, are the words: "Sej Hatao," "Zamin bachao" (Remove the SEZ, Save the Land). Underneath are two bigger lines that say "Polepally sejunu etthiveyali, Palamooru rythunu bathikinchu/chaali"[10] ("Overthrow/overturn the Polepally SEZ," "Save/Give life to the Palamoor farmer"). Below that, in Telugu again, is the short and somewhat abrupt word "demands." Listed right under "demands" are the following: "Maa bhoomulu maaku kavali," "Ekaraaku padilakhsalu nashtaparihaaramu ivvali," "Intikoudyogamu railwaylo kalipinchaali" ("We want our lands," "For every acre, the compensation for loss/destruction should be ten lakhs of rupees," "Every house/home should get a job in the Railways"). In green, in much smaller letters, underneath all these demands, is the name of an organization, "Polepally Sej Vyathirekha Aikya Sanghatana, Mahabubnagar" (Coalition/Alliance against the Polepally SEZ, Mahabubnagar).

The overarching claims are categorical and concrete: "Remove the SEZ, Save the Land. Overthrow the Polepally SEZ, Save/Give life to the Palamoor Farmer." And then come the "demands," the first of which is unequivocal too: "We want our lands back." But the next two demands are more qualified: One asks for an increased compensation of 10 lakhs per acre and the other for the guarantee of a job in the Railways.

One way to read this is to take the lead from the name of the organization, an organization united/allied against the Polepally SEZ and to see, in the listing, the articulation of a diversity of demands, demands that have been politically brought together under the sign of a common alliance and organization. So it is possible to see that, while some of these farmers might want their land back, others might be more inclined to settle for a higher, fairer compensation (10 lakhs for an acre of land they have lost) or the promise of a guaranteed source of livelihood for the household (not an individual) in a public sector (and hence more secure) company like the Indian Railways. The grievances regarding the SEZ thus have many faces but also, at least in this protest, appear united in their opposition to its presence.

A second banner held by the protestors shows the graphic of a map of Andhra Pradesh grasped by a hand with a line at the top saying:

"Ammakani Andhra Pradesh" (Andhra Pradesh for Sale). At the bottom of the poster is the line: "Vela: Lakshalaadimandi Prajala Upaadhi Praanaalu" (Price/Value: The livelihood and lives of lakhs of people). But reading these signs and understanding the words of the protestors or their songs also requires some entry into, some familiarity with Telugu, orally and as script (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Urdu/Hindi).

There are, of course, a few banners in English: one that says, "APIIC: the 250,000 acre land bank"; another with SEZ written on it; but none with any demands listed on them are easily visible. There is not much explanation in English in these video frames. One sees some English on the APIIC building, its name along with "6th floors" (sic) and "the future is here" emblazoned without any Telugu translation underneath the name. There are English signs, names of TV stations, on the phalanx of mikes thrust, in battle fashion, towards this speaker or that. But triangulated in between the concrete face of the APIIC building at the back and the mikes held out by anonymous hands in front is a lot of activity that is not easy to read if you don't understand Telugu.

Should I take it for granted that this video would be read differently, heard differently, by a non-Telugu speaking or reading audience? Can I be certain that other audiences would, knowing that they do not know Telugu, withhold judgment, or await translation before passing comment on this clip of a movement? But am I not also worried that there is a surplus of other signs here, a variety of visual cues, that many readers, especially Indian, are already familiar with or assume some familiarity? Is there maybe another way to read this story, as a story told primarily through pictures, minimizing the reliance on Telugu? What would that be?

From this perspective, in between the English signs, what is visible are the faces and bodies of women, attired in colorful and contrasting sarees and blouses and men in plain white shirts and dark trousers. There is a *banjara* woman, dressed in all her mirrored and colorful (red, blue and pink patch-worked) finery, right in front of the camera. Interspersed with some of the activists are other women in purple and green and yellow, striking colors that draw attention to them as persons, and as individuals with a distinctive presence that is difficult to miss, especially if you notice their defiant gestures and powerful voices. The men, in their pale or lightly colored shirts, emerge as a swaying, moving row of arms and heads, dotted occasionally by a deep blue or a patterned brown. But the women take center stage.

The frame is now occupied by a grey-haired older woman, in a dark green saree and orange blouse, a thin patterned cotton cloth/towel thrown over her shoulder, one hand raised in a denunciatory gesture, a hand that moves up and down, denounces, three times as the video

proceeds. There are other women's hands that relate to and talk with each other through smaller but no less significant gestures: reassuring taps on the shoulders or through restraining modulations of each other. Among the observers, I catch sight of three khaki-clad women, police presumably, watching, with a sort of sympathetic, not unfriendly or hostile, amusement. Neither to observers (like me) nor the police nor the activists are the men and women in the middle total strangers. These are people we all know, people like these, women and men from the districts, from the villages or the village-like *bastis* of the city, people who are already implicated in our lives intimately, with individual names and personalities and family histories. And yet, how much of what they are saying and protesting about will come through without an entry into Telugu here?

My memory of attending some public meetings on Telangana with non-Telugu speaking friends comes to the fore here. What I remember distinctly about that moment is how people in a crowded auditorium, named after a famous Communist leader, made way for us because they thought we were reporters and journalists i.e. observers and non-participants, i.e. well-wishers maybe but not one of them. Jeans and t-shirts, kurtas and khakis, sneakers and slippers, carry a cultural code well before you have even said anything. The reporter is important but not necessarily one of the protestors. If you know Telugu, especially Telangana Telugu, you might have to speak to actually establish a different reading of yourself, if that is possible. You are read and understood and slotted as soon as you are visible. I feel a burden I don't quite understand: to exceed that specific frame they will have for me, if that is at all possible. Hence the desire in such moments, to speak, to say something in Telangana Telugu, to assert one's political bonafides, in some minor, maybe self-affirming, way.

The woman in the purple saree is now in front of all the mikes. She is raising her hand up and down and saying "Maa bhumulu maaku" and the crowd responds "kaavali"! Her strength and force are evident, but is that enough to cross the English frame containing her? The testimony of her fisted hands, her emphatic gestures, the way she listens to the questions and shakes her head almost as if to question the ignorance/credulity of the questioner, of someone like me, the manner in which two of the women squatting behind her join their voices and gestures with her, as they seem to answer the questions asked in common, as if to convey their shared anger, is nothing short of electrifying. Then the camera frame and the mikes move to a grey-haired man with grey stubble, in a lightly patterned shirt sitting next to the woman in purple. His hands are not visible but his face is intense as he talks. His gestures are

restrained but the woman behind him seems to make up for it by emphatically joining in occasionally. He explains his predicament, his problems, after the SEZ came into his life and land, in Telugu. The camera and the mikes move again, this time to another grey-haired man, now standing, who is equally eloquent in Telugu, but his Telugu, unlike that of those who preceded him is peppered with English words and some Hindi ("development," "anti-people's development," "APIIC," "Dalal," "broker," "SEZ," "Naya Jagirdar," "Naya Zamindar," "Market rate," "Telangana").

"Naa peru Sukamma," she says, when asked her name. "Na peru Gangam Balaiah," he says, when asked his name. Sukamma wants to know how she is expected to live, where she is supposed to go, once her land has been taken and prices have gone up so much. She wants those who have taken her land to "come down" to face her, face them. Aurobindo Pharma and Itero company (Hetero drugs), which have been given her land, should come down, she says. Why have they come to Hyderabad, today, someone asks her? Why have they come to Hyderabad, she repeats? They have come here, that son (*aakoduku*) has come here, to destroy us, to lay us waste, she says, assuming that it is the arrival of the pharma companies that the questioner is asking about. Maybe she doesn't quite realize, as the reporter assumed, that it is her presence here that raises a question for him, not that of the pharma companies in Hyderabad. I cannot but smile at that confidence, that certainty of her place and location, on the streets of Hyderabad. She doesn't know, and doesn't think or care, that she might be out-of-place here. It is the pharma companies that deserve that anxiety.

Why have you all come here to Hyderabad, the question comes again, gentler this time, as taps from the women at her side and behind guide her to the other dimensions of the question? We?! We have come here because we want our land back, we want our water back, we want to grow our own crops—why should we have to do coolie work? We want to till our own land—why should we have to go out? Her right hand pounds rhythmically into her left as she stresses each of the "we wants." How many acres of land, did you have, *amma* (mother, and more generally a term of respect)? The questioner is more respectful now. Six acres, *ayya*! (Sir, father; she is returning the respect). Six acres, she repeats. Six acres have gone, she says with a definitive wave of her hand. What will they do with my six acres? What will they do? What are you doing now? I am doing coolie work in that company. Coolie work—and she curses the company (*aacompanylo mannupada!*) What is your name? My name is Sukamma, she says, shaking her fist.

Grit and determination—a readiness to stand up, a certainty about her place and rights, a willingness to call her tormentors down, to argue, to

curse and damn those who have been unjust, to fight for her rights—radiate from Sukamma. Her words, her gestures, her way of answering questions, her openness to being guided by others around, but also her intense focus on engaging the questioners directly mark these few minutes of her presence on the video. She is very much a political being, at home asserting her rights publicly, on the street, and on video. But how much of her politics, what aspects of this political life, will come through, transgress, our English texts on peasants and their revolutions, their rationalities and their weapons?

On the flickr page of a blog devoted to the Polepally issue, there is a cartoon from a popular Telugu daily, *Andhra Jyothi*.[11] It shows a group of angry people agitating in front of the Chief Minister's (CM's) office holding placards indicating a struggle for land. The men are barefoot, have stubble on their chins, and are wearing colorful shirts and dhotis that come up to their knees (signs sometimes, one could say, of the districts/rural populace). The CM's office is guarded by an elaborately dressed gate-keeper, a chowkidar/guard whose white dress, sash, shoes and striking turban speak of the heritage of colonial times but is also the norm in terms of Indian governmental offices at the higher levels. The guard is a bit nervous but has enough verve to offer some advice to the angry agitators: This is not the way to come and see the CM, he says helpfully. Please come back wearing suits and boots and carrying some suitcases and the CM will give away acres and acres of land!

Cosmopolitanisms

Sukamma wanted Aurobindo Pharma and Hetero Pharma to come down to face her. She was demanding a dialogical engagement of sorts. In doing that, she had given some of the otherwise unknown companies in the SEZ a name. I wanted to get some sense of their faces too: Who were these beings—those sons, *aakodukulu*—who had, along with the state, come into her language and her life and pushed her into a politics of the street? What face did they have in the world? How do they appear in our presence?

Genuflecting to the norm now in social interactions, I looked to Google for my first introduction. Even as I start punching in Aurobindo, Aurobindo Pharma wiki comes up as the fourth or so suggested entry in Google, just behind the better-known and more historical figure of Aurobindo Ghosh. Clicking on their webpage takes me to a series of screens presenting various dimensions of Aurobindo Pharma. On the top left side of the opening screen, there's the company's logo (a curvy greenish A necked by a blue semicircle), followed by its name and underneath

that the phrase "Committed to healthier life!" Images of people, predominantly white, dressed in the whiter uniforms of scientists/technicians, flicker on and off against the backdrop of information on the company: "Through Trust," "Through Growth," "Through Partnership," "Through Capability," "Aurobindo's Workforce is Making Tomorrow Possible," say the flashing screens.

I switch from a general search and move to Google's other registers (images, maps, videos, news and so on) and Aurobindo's extensive web presence is difficult to miss. Particularly instructive here is an image of a member of its Board of Directors beaming and receiving a certificate/award from the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh at a meeting of Pharmexcil (the Pharmaceutical Export Council of India), the former dressed in "suits and boots" as the cartoonist had foreseen and the latter in a white kurta-pyjama. Go down further and Aurobindo Pharma registers its presence in maps (with a Google map of its location near Hyderabad; Survey no. 61–65, National Highway 5, Industrial Development Area, Pydibheemavaram, Andhra Pradesh 532409, India), in videos (Buy Aurobindo Pharma, CBI raids Aurobindo Pharma Offices, Stocks to Watch: Aurobindo Pharma), in News ("Aurobindo Pharma Gets USFDA Approval To Launch Anti-diabetic Drug in US," "Aurobindo Pharma Planning To Challenge SPCB order," "Investors Can Pick Aurobindo Pharma Stock with Long Term Horizon, 'Sell' Tata Steel, 'Buy' Aurobindo Pharma futures: Way2Wealth"), in Books (*International Marketing: Text and Cases*: page 45, Section 4, *Aurobindo Pharma's International Expansion Strategies; India's Global Wealth Club: The Stunning Rise of Its Billionaires*, p. 262) and extensively in patents (pharmaceutical compositions of antiretrovirals, US Pat. App.–Filed April 24, 2006 the first in a long list of other patent apps. by Aurobindo Pharma). There are many ways to "know" Aurobindo Pharma, to feel its presence and appearance. Positively or negatively, it is difficult to miss its face.

Coming back to its website, I am dazzled by its self-presentation: Various windows are available for me to navigate and acquire further knowledge of this life form, windows with familiar and unfamiliar banners: ARVs/HIVs, Peptides, Market Watch (Share Price Analysis, Stock Charts, Stock Updates, NSE Market Tracker), Strategic Alliances, Social Responsibility, Global Leadership Position in Anti-Infectives, Investor Relations, Global Family, News Corner, Milestones, Chairman's Message. All the while, the message about the tomorrow that its workforce is making possible flashes me incessantly: Through Trust ("Single Product Filed in 25 Countries"), Through Growth ("40% Topline Growth in the Last 4 years"), Through Partnership ("Associated with the UNO for Development of ARVs"), Through Capability ("4900

KL Reaction Capability, 55 Types of Reaction"), Aurobindo's Workforce is Making Tomorrow Possible ("Over 9500 employees from 26 countries").

Here is the self-presentation of a life-form that, even as it originates in Hyderabad, is spread, product- and workforce-wise, over a number of countries and speaks a globally legible language of health, life, growth, responsibility, family, leadership, trust, partnership, capability and, more than anything else, "making tomorrow possible." A healthier life and the possibility of tomorrow itself: strong claims about life, time and the world. Aurobindo Pharma manufactures not just products but produces tomorrow itself—makes the future possible. Does this invention of the future, this production of tomorrow, imply that it also, like the postcolonial state, anxiously leaves the past behind? Is it necessarily in the business of devalorizing or destroying, wittingly or unwittingly, what is not meant for the future?

What was Sukamma asking for when she wanted Aurobindo Pharma to come and face her? Type in Sukamma and even Google is skeptical of my inquiry. "Did you mean," it quizzes me: "Sukam Sukimma Zookamma Sukma"? and the first few entries that it offers, while it gives me time and opportunity to correct myself, take me to Sukammas in Indonesia, on Facebook, on twitter and to a "Sexy baby MP3 download." Troubled at the asymmetry of presence, I double back to the YouTube video: what sort of an encounter is possible between the Aurobindo Pharmas and Sukammas? If Aurobindo Pharma lays claim to making possible a tomorrow and advertises its commitment to a healthier life, what does Sukamma offer as a counter-claim? What can she say, speak or present that would engage, persuade or interrupt Aurobindo Pharma's flashings/flauntings of itself to us?

Slogans, songs, raised fists, in Telugu and Hindi? Sukamma wants to see those who have her land now with her own eyes, while Gangam Balaiah talks of dying (saying he's brought his own "Endrin"—a pesticide) if his land is not given back to him (Of what use is my life now?). And yet, wouldn't all this, even if it receives the attention of a curious viewer, seem so much "noise" in the face of the smoothness of the self-presentation of Aurobindo Pharma? Under what conditions would an observer throw in their lot with Sukamma and Balaiah as the harbingers of another future, of another commitment, of other designs, unstated and yet present in full measure, to a different, healthier national and global life? At the end of the day, as the present is mortgaged for tomorrow, isn't the best possible deal that Sukamma and Balaiah will get be a refinancing that only offers them "adequate" or "good compensation"? What would it mean to see them not as conceptually bankrupt

and hence destined to fail but only as flailing in the uncommon present we have mortgaged?

What would it mean to see them also as global? Can one, currently, see, think and write those other globalities, those other designs of the global?

Notes

1 For Prof. Kodandaram on Frantz Fanon and Thomas Paine, see "Telangana: Prof. Kodandaram Speech in T.V.V. Meeting," www.youtube.com/watch?v=6A3c0BzCH24&feature=related; "HMTV Dasha Disha with Literary Experts Part 7—Deshapathi Srinivas," www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jymeRusFh8; "4th NRI Telangana Day conducted By (TDF-UsA) 15," www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRKQzCEyvjo.
2 I have italicized a couple of the Telugu words and edited a couple of typos. But, otherwise, the letter is copied verbatim from what has been posted at: www.etelangana.org/photo_Bommala_album.asp also at: http://telanganaonline.org/tbrs/?p=52.
3 Munīf, Abdelrahman. *Cities of Salt*. New York: Random House, 1991.
4 Nilekani, Nandan. *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
5 www.etelangana.org/Prof_sujatha_surepally.asp.
6 See Rakesh Dubbudu's blog, www.rakesh-will-do-it.blogspot.com.
7 See pp. 18–19, "The Impact of Special Economic Zones in India: A Case Study of Polepally SEZ," Report prepared by Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Mamidi Bharat Bhushan, and Sujatha Surepally, for the International Land Coalition, January 2011. I would like to express my deep appreciation of Dileep Konatham for making this available to me.
8 Ibid.
9 "Polepally Farmers Protest in Front of APIIC Office, Hyderabad," *YouTube*, February 7, 2009. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILwWg_6SvbI.
10 The ending of that phrase is not clearly visible.
11 www.flickr.com/photos/polepally/2910217680.

5 Global forgings

Wordly motion

Words herd. As poems, songs and speeches, as slogans and letters, as bodies in flames, they come together as a formation of the real, as information. Words in formation make and remake political realities. Telangana, currently, is one such formation. It breathes political life. It forges worlds and selves.

Telangana disrupts my inherited formations of the postcolony. As a song, through the voices of Gaddar and Deshapati—*amma Telangananamma, aakali kekala gaanama*—through the rhythmically jerky movements of Goreti Venkanna, through the arresting dances in red of Vimalakka and her sisters, clad in sarees and keds, it unsettles the words, sentences, paragraphs, and texts I have been accumulating and arranging as India.

Wordly movements in the social reveal uncommon and disturbing patterns. Telangana's movements teach me that colonial sentences run on to serve the new postcolonial state. I see that radicals and progressives pray too, at the colonizers' statues. Tracing Telangana's texture over law, I sense that the postcolonial state does not deter from manipulating or killing its own. I am not surprised, no—I am still surprised that public servants with visible bloodstains get re-elected and praised for promoting development in their state, again and again.

More than anything else, the movement of Telangana questions me. It interrogates my arranged order of the self and my presentations of the international. Challenging my apparently healthy distance from the world that I research, write and teach about, it probes the deeper intimacies involved, particularizes me to names that will not stay hidden and caste histories that should not be sanitized. As Telangana's songs sway me, songs emerging from pain, from joy, poignant songs moving millions, I am also struck by those in my locales who might see these bodies but not hear what I think I am now able to hear, maybe

quite faintly. I can share the joy of *Kolaveri, Kolaveri* but not of Goreti Venkanna's *Ravacchu Povacchu Royallamukovacchu* with them. Telangana makes the provincial accessible to my frameworks of the global and yet denies my efforts to translate it adequately. It compels me to recognize the impossibility of writing relations of the international without those words passing through me, rewriting me, in that process.

Can the presentation of international realities be separated from questions of how the writer's self has been forged and the forgeries that he/she is, as a result, then susceptible to reading as real? And questions of how my self has been forged: What goes into the production of that knowledge? I find myself asking questions, not about other producers of knowledge, but about myself, about my epistemological receptivity to hearing the politics of colonial and postcolonial auditions: what songs do I not hear, have never heard, what other forms of life do I sense but not understand in that materialization of tuneful words, in that chorus of anthems we sing as the international?

The provincial and the postcolonial

> "I was born in a small South Indian Telangana village…"

Thus begins Kancha Ilaiah's highly influential book, a Dalit-Bahujan text, "Why I am not a Hindu." With a title like that, and a textual history like mine, my first reference, of course, was the secular-analytical world invoked by Bertrand Russell's (1957) "Why I am not a Christian." But Ilaiah takes you elsewhere. He takes you not to Russell's rational fiefdom but to a Telangana village, to a small patch of semi-arid land and a commons that he locates himself in. And situated thus, he tells us what words are being used to describe him, what is constantly being poured into his ears, and why he rejects those words:

> Suddenly, since about 1990 the word "Hindutva" has begun to echo in our ears, day in and day out, as if everyone in India who is not a Muslim, a Christian, or a Sikh is a Hindu. Suddenly I am being told that I am a Hindu. I am also told that my parents, relatives, and the caste in which we were born and brought up are Hindu. This totally baffles me. In fact, the whole cultural milieu of the urban middle class—the newspapers that I read, the T.V. that I see—keeps assaulting me, morning and evening, forcing me to declare that I am a Hindu. (1996: x)

Baffled thus, he revisits the question:

> The question before me now is not whether I must treat Muslims or Christians or Sikhs as enemies, as the Hindutva school wants me to do. The question is: What do we, the lower Sudras and Ati-Sudras (whom I also call Dalitbahujans), have to do with Hinduism or with Hindutva itself?
>
> (Ibid.)

He rejects/negates the word: "I, indeed not only I, but all of us, the Dalitbahujans of India, have never heard the word 'Hindu'—not as a word, nor as the name of a culture, nor as the name of a religion in our early childhood days."

And he changes the language and the locale within which this word needs to audition itself. We are brought swiftly into that "small South Indian Telangana village" and into Telangana Telugu: "We heard about *Turukoollu* (Muslims), we heard about *Kirastaanapoollu* (Christians), we heard about *Baapanoollu* (Brahmins) and *Koomatoollu* (Baniyas) spoken of as people who were different from us." Ilaiah is not positing an alternative totality as much as pluralizing the village further. He traces the lines of difference in that village community, but within those differences some are more different than others: "Among these four categories, the most different were the Baapanoollu and the Koomatoollu."

Why were these groups, who in another register, for example, a Hindutva world or the sociologist M.N. Srinivas's world[1], would be seen along with Ilaiah's community as also "Hindu," "most different"?:

> "There are at least some aspects of life common to us and the Turukoollu and the Kirastaanapoollu. We all eat meat, we all touch each other."

"We all eat meat, we all touch each other." Meat and touch, food and physical fraternity, redraw the map of India here, unsettling the widespread misconception of a majority of Indians as "vegetarians" and forcing us to think, once again, of India in terms of who can or cannot touch whom. Are you closer to a fellow who does not eat your food and will not touch you or one who does both? The commonness of this very Indian knowledge, our intimate awareness of it and yet our even deeper denial of it—we all know this, we practice it, we just won't theorize the world through these axes or, if forced to, we will either relocate this in a distant historical past or to an eventual disappearance in the future, i.e. we refuse its reality and materiality in the present—and how Ilaiah's words draw on this materiality of everyday life to fragment the Hindu is sheer poetry.

"We all eat meat, we all touch each other." So don't tell me that I should think of the Christian and the Muslim as my enemy and you (who won't eat my food or be comfortable touching me) as my community:

> With the Turukoollu, we shared several other cultural relations. We both celebrated the *Peerila* festival. Many Turukoollu came with us to the fields. The only people with whom we had no relations, whatsoever, were the Bapanoollu and the Koomatoollu. But today we are suddenly being told that we have a common religious and cultural relationship with the Baapanoollu and the Koomatoollu.

Out of such everyday materials, meat and touch, festivals and fields, Ilaiah fashions a world, a commons and many a desperately needed conceptual weapon. Unlike Bertrand Russell whose essay battles the glories of Jesus and the dogmas of the Church by invoking the terrorizing difference of an irrational and Orientalist East,[2] Ilaiah resurrects Telangana goddesses, gods, buffaloes, bunds, sheep, toddy, dung and social discriminations—the bric-a-brac of agrarian social life—that goes into the making of a majority of the people—the *dalit bahujans*—around him to take on that majoritarian reality which reads itself as Hindu. He forges a new reality against the political forgery of Hindutva.

Not surprisingly, the text was a political bombshell when it first appeared, at the height of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)'s country-wide mobilization of Indians as predominantly Hindus. Ilaiah's view of India from a Telangana village redrew borders, asserted suppressed identities, slashed and burned hegemonizing claims and effectively limited the term "Hindu," at best, to extremely small, caste-privileged groups. It provincialized the "fundamentalist" Hindu just as he was enveloping everyone in a majoritarian politics and it provincialized the "secular-postcolonial" Indian by baring the threads of caste that went into their social making too. Into the postcolonial's performance of secularity and liberalism and cosmopolitanism, Ilaiah persistently, annoyingly, read back the aura of caste, a powerful social aura that could not be displaced by private gestures of disavowal.

Ilaiah had done this before. At the height of an anti-reservations/anti-affirmative action campaign by upper-caste students in Andhra Pradesh, Ilaiah had intervened with an article in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, titled "Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate." Recreating, once again, the Telangana milieu that had produced him, he highlighted the arrogance of the upper castes who, in protesting against the increased quotas for others, depicted their likely futures as one of shining shoes on the streets or performing other "menial" tasks rather than what

they saw as their entitlement to become doctors and engineers. Ilaiah's article effectively said that what you are mocking as a deplorable future state for you is my family and caste and community's present and what you are claiming to be your "merit" and your "competitiveness" in securing entry into medical schools and engineering colleges is merely unmerited social privilege.[3]

Nothing was sacred in this dimension. The much-respected APCLC (Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee) saw a split on caste lines when activists such as Ilaiah took issue with the upper-caste orientation of the then existing leadership. Ilaiah notes that, when he raised this issue in the APCLC he was pilloried for his inability to appreciate the personal sacrifices and the self-less life led by some of these upper-caste leaders.[4] His response was once again to draw attention to the social power that enabled such "sacrifices" in many cases and restricted them in others. He said personal sacrifice was unthinkable for him, for someone from his background, since many others of his family and immediate community depended on his salary and his apartment. But the upper-caste leaders could afford to "sacrifice" because they had an entire community structure to back up their dependents. Correct or not, no dimension of political life was spared Ilaiah's critical perspective, a perspective that used caste difference to cleave liberal pieties in Indian public spaces.

Out of the distinctiveness of a commons, a Telangana world, Ilaiah had twice forged effective conceptual weapons to provincialize hegemonizing claims, once of an upper-caste anti-affirmative action ideology and then of an upper-caste Hindutva ideology. He had, to use Gyan Pandey's terms here, relied on a fragment ("a disturbing element, a disturbance, a rupture … in the self representation of particular totalities and those who uncritically uphold them")[5] to resist "the shallow claims of a universal."[6] Today, Ilaiah is at it, once again, as he argues for the cooking and serving of beef in the dormitories/messes of Indian universities, implicitly bringing out the limited nature of what is accepted as a "public" space in India.[7]

Why do I invoke Ilaiah in raising the issue of forging new designs of the global? Maybe to highlight the ways in which the subaltern as peasant-citizen, the subaltern as dalitbahujan-theorist, as a majority to come flooding academia, cannot be thought, any longer, as confined to an archival past (from which they have to be read "against the grain," and through "scrupulously follow[ing] every accepted professional norm and not let[ting] anyone accuse us of shoddy scholarship"[8]) or a silent space in the academic present ("for we do not write for the peasants"[9]) from where they need to be translated "in such a manner as to make visible all the problems of translating diverse and enchanted worlds into the universal and disenchanted language of sociology?"[10] Perhaps the subaltern,

as peasant-citizen and political/social theorist, can no longer be the "object" of professional studies but the subject of a learning relationship.[11] As Ilaiah cautions, in his introduction:

> Let me make it clear, however, that I am not writing this book to convince suspicious brahminical minds; I am writing this book for all those who have open minds. My request to Brahmin, Baniya and Neo-Kshatriya intellectuals is this: For about three thousand years you people learnt only how to teach and what to teach others—the Dalitbahujans. Now in your own interest and in the interest of this great country you must learn to listen and to read what we have to say.

Teaching the other is different from learning from the other, learning from those whom we present as different. Would learning to listen and learning to read—learning, not studying—throw up new designs of the global?

Notes

1 Pandian, M.S.S. "Writing Ordinary Lives," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 (38) 2008: 96–106; Pandey, Gyanendra (ed.). *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories: Investigations From India and the USA*. London: Routledge, 2010.

2 Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men.

Russell, Bertrand *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1957). www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html.

3 Ilaiah, Kancha. "Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25(41) 1990: 2307–10.

4 YouTube interview on his biography, DalitCamera Ambedkar. "The Making of Prof. Kancha Ilaiah Osmania University," www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmu98HWqQPE.

5 Pandey, Gyan cited in Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

6 Ibid.

7 "Prof. Kancha Ilaiah: 'Beef, BJP, and Food Rights of People'," www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmWWwxZBbW0. Krishna, S. Rama. "The Beef Eaters of Osmania," *The Beef Eaters of Osmania*; April 22, 2012. www.sunday-guardian.com/investigation/the-beef-eaters-of-osmania.

8 Chatterjee 2012: 45.

9 Chakrabarty 2000: 89.

10 Ibid.

11 Bush, Andrew. *Teaching Continually: Beginning with Lévinas*, in Davison, Andrew and Himadeep Muppidi (eds) *Europe and Its Boundaries:Words and Worlds, Within and Beyond*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009.

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